



# **THE MINSK GHETTO 1941–1943**

Jewish Resistance and Soviet Internationalism

**BARBARA EPSTEIN**



THE S. MARK TAPER FOUNDATION  
IMPRINT IN JEWISH STUDIES



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and Soviet Internationalism*

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*For Samantha*

*And in memory of Larry Levine and Eli Katz*





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Many people helped with this book, in many ways. Some helped me find interviewees and other sources, others helped me learn languages, still others commented on drafts, and so on. In fact, many people helped me in more ways than one. Describing the myriad forms of assistance that I received would require a chapter in itself. Except in a few cases I mention names only once. This project has taken nearly seven years, and over that time many people have contributed to it. If I should fail to mention anyone, I hope that I will be forgiven.

Galina and Frank Swartz were the godparents of this book. Their extensive role in making this book possible is described in the introduction. Here I will mention only that this book rests largely on research that they made possible, by finding translators for me, pointing me to archives and introducing me to the people who could help me gain access to those archives, and opening many other doors. Galina served as translator for many of my interviews in Minsk, translated innumerable archival documents, led me to many sources of other kinds, and escorted me around Minsk. She and Frank introduced me to others who also played important roles in this project. Grigori (Grisha) Hosid served as translator for my first two rounds of interviews with ghetto survivors in Minsk and also met me in Israel and translated interviews with Minsk ghetto survivors there as well. His rapport with fellow ghetto survivors and his firsthand knowledge of life in the Byelorussian ghettos and partisan units were essential to this project. Natalia A. Yatskevich, Director of the Ex-

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Natalia Yatskevich introduced me to Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director of the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, who also provided generous assistance throughout this project. He pointed me to documents, explained their context, and showed me documents from his own collection. The staff of the National Archives was unfailingly helpful. I also consulted documents in the Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, in Minsk, and the National Archive of Film, Phono and Photo Documents, in Dzerzhinsk, and appreciated the help of staff in both institutions. The staff of the Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus located and translated documents for me; I appreciated in particular the assistance of Igor Valakhanovich in making this possible.

Through Grisha Hosid, and Frank and Galina, I met Mikhail Kantorovich and Mikhail Treister, the heads of the Byelorussian Public Union of Former Ghetto Prisoners and Former Jewish Prisoners of Nazi Concentration Camps, and Frieda Losik-Reyzman, the head of the Organization of Child Ghetto Survivors; both organizations are located in Minsk. They provided me with names and phone numbers of Minsk ghetto survivors, and all generously offered help and advice throughout this project. Mikhail Kantorovich and Mikhail Treister provided invaluable assistance by commenting on drafts of chapters. Zinaida Alexeevna Nikodemova gave me access to the papers of her mother, Chasya Mendeleevna Pruslina, and shared memories of her mother. Raissa Andreyevna Chernoglazova, editor of many collections of documents concerning the war and its aftermath in Byelorussia, gave generously of her time on many occasions and gave me photographs and documents from her own collection. Tatiana Yegorova located and translated archival documents. Elena Gapova shared her memories of talk of the Minsk underground in Minsk in the 1970s. Sasha Milantai served as translator for several interviews and in many other ways as well.

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This project required the ability to read documents and other texts in Yiddish and Hebrew. Eli Katz not only taught me Yiddish but also always found the time to translate words that could not be found in any dictionary, to decipher handwritten documents, and to explain the meaning of Yiddish cultural references. The knowledge of Yiddish and Yiddish culture that I gained from Eli was crucial to this project. He died before the book was published. I also studied Yiddish at the Vilnius Summer Yiddish Program with Dovid Katz, who first suggested that I take a research trip into Belarus, and at YIVO with Mordkhe Schaechter. My Yiddish reading circle helped my Yiddish as well. Throughout this project I have studied Hebrew with Anat Wolins. Ilana Brody spent many hours helping me learn to read Hebrew by going over Hebrew language memoirs from Minsk and histories of Jewish Kovno with me. Joni Wajnryb worked with me in the same way on other Hebrew texts.



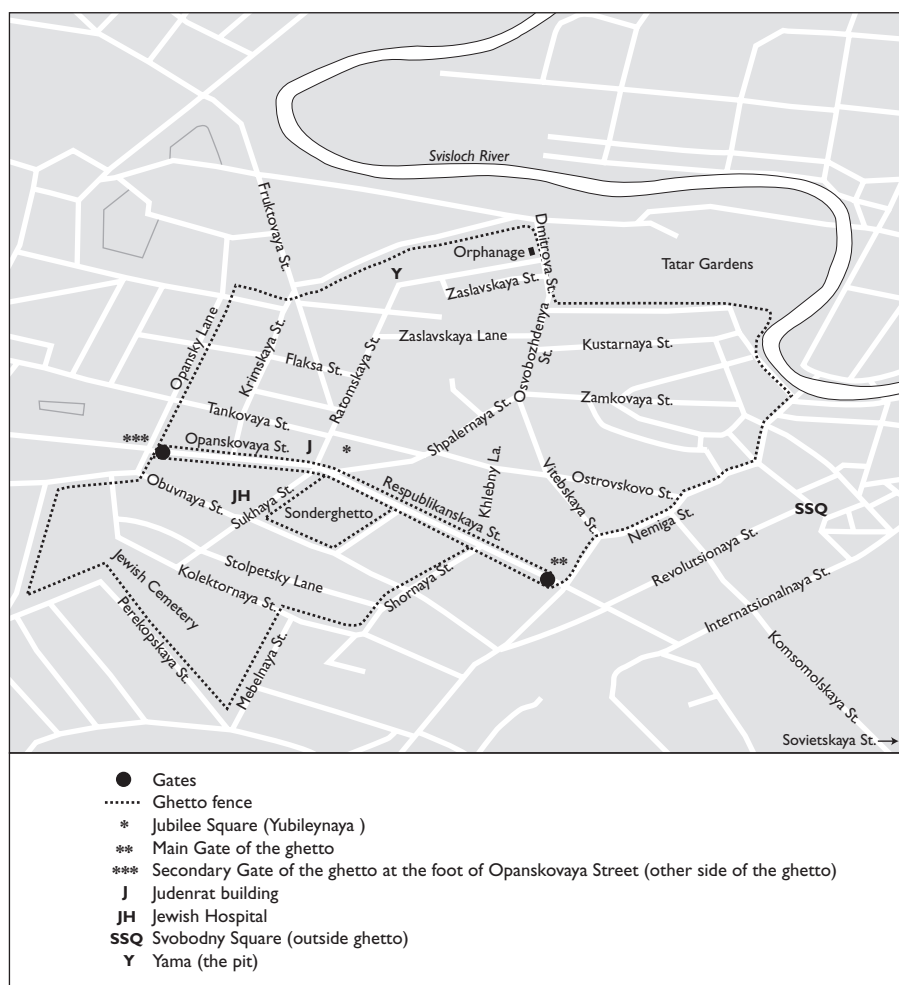
Through the efforts of Anat, Ilana, and Joni I learned to read Hebrew texts on my own. Yael Chaver typed letters for me in Hebrew when I found that my Word program could not handle this task.

My first trip to Minsk to locate and interview ghetto survivors was supported by a generous gift from Janet Kranzburg. Without this early assistance, the project probably would have remained an unexplored thought rather than becoming a reality. Later research trips, and time off from teaching for research and writing, were made possible by support from the International Institute for Research on Jewish Women (Brandeis University); the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture; the Center for Cultural Studies of the University of California, Santa Cruz; and the UCSC Academic Senate Committee on Research. My research trips would also not have been possible without the many friends and students who house-sat for me and took care of my cat: Julie Beagle, Doug Bevington, Sean Burns, Scout Calvert, Chris Dixon, Sasha Lilley, Sandra Meucci, Chris Owen, Dana Saunders, Alexis Shotwell.

My literary agent, Sydelle Kramer, helped find a good home for my project at UC Press, where my editor, Stan Holwitz, skillfully guided my manuscript through its last stages and to publication.

I was sustained by the support and encouragement of friends, colleagues, cousins, and siblings, who put up with my distracted air and my obsession with the Minsk ghetto, about which they no doubt heard far more than they wanted. I especially want to mention JJ and Eva Bear-Johnson, Chris Dixon, Michael Goldhaber, Elinor Gollay, Steven Joseph, David Kotz, Sasha Lilley, Ilene Philipson, Lisa Rubens, John Sanbonmatsu, Maureen Sullivan, Kay Trimberger, Nancy Zeigler, and Stacey Ross, who did not live to see the completion of this book. Throughout this project I felt the quiet, steady support of my beloved cat, Samantha, who forgave me for my absences and loyally kept me company, sitting on my lap or on my desk next to my computer through the writing of this book. She died just before I completed the corrections on the manuscript. She is badly missed.

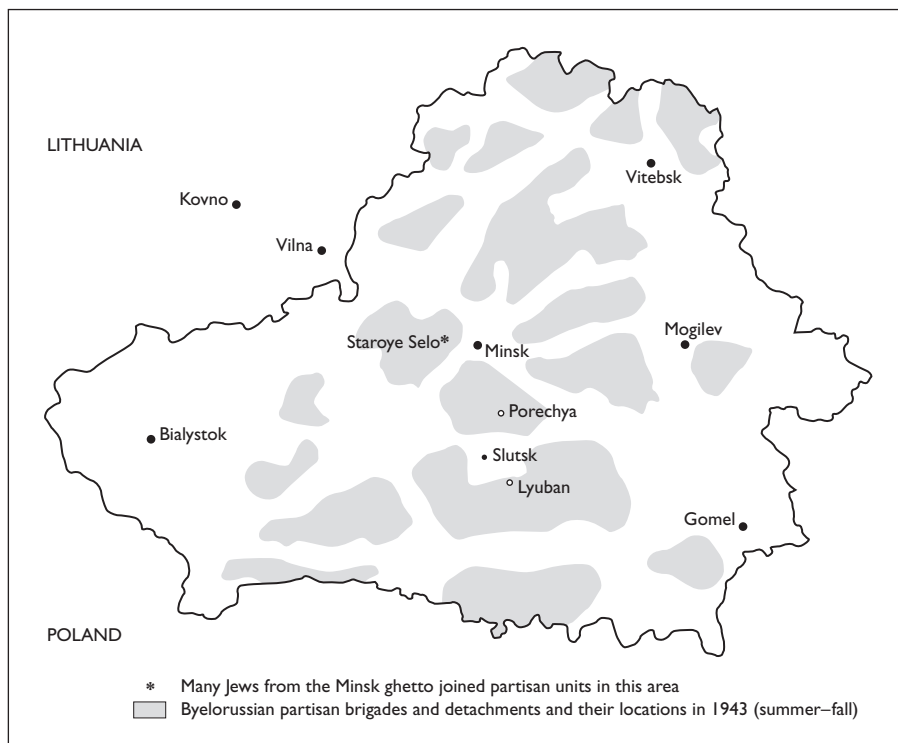
My greatest debt is to the many ghetto survivors and other survivors of the war, Jews and non-Jews, who invited me into their homes and delved into painful wartime memories, in some cases repeatedly, over the course of my research. I hope that my book is worthy of the trust that they have placed in me.



Map 1. The Minsk ghetto, showing original boundaries. Adapted from Dan Zhits, *Gito Minsk ve'Toldotav le'Or ha'Teud he'Xadash* (The History of the Minsk Ghetto in Light of the New Documentation), Basic Research Series no. 13 (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2000) 5; additional data from Abram Rubenchik, *Pravda o Minskoy Geto* (The Truth about the Minsk Ghetto) (Tel Aviv: Krugozor [Prospect], 1999) 184–85.



Map 2. Eastern Europe, showing national borders prior to September 1, 1939. Adapted from map by Chief of Engineers, US Army, Army Map Service, June 1943.



Map 3. Byelorussia, 1943. Drawn from map of partisan brigades and units in Byelorussia in 1943, *All-People's Struggle in Byelorussia against the German-Fascist Aggressors in the Years of the Great Patriotic War*, vol. 2, A. A. Filimonov et al. (Minsk: Belarus, 1984), p. 177.



# Introduction

This project had its inception in the summer of 1997, when I was studying Yiddish at the Vilnius Summer Program in Yiddish. The major assignment for my class was to research and write a paper on Jewish history in Vilnius, and then give a report in Yiddish to the class. I located two women in Vilnius who had participated in the Vilna ghetto underground, interviewed them, and wrote the paper. When I gave my report to the class, one of my fellow students, a woman from Minsk, told me that there were circles of people living in Minsk who had participated in the underground movement in the Minsk ghetto, and if I was interested, I should go to Minsk and talk to them. I realized that this was unusual: most of the survivors of ghetto resistance movements in Poland and Lithuania had emigrated to Israel or North America. I also knew that little had been written on resistance in the Minsk ghetto. So in the fall of 1999, I took a quarter off from teaching and went to Minsk.

I knew no one in Minsk, or anywhere in Belarus. I had studied Russian in college but had retained little beyond the ability to read Cyrillic. Having heard that there was an association of ghetto survivors in Minsk, I found an e-mail list for Belarussian émigrés and asked for help in locating the group. Someone suggested that I contact the head rabbi in one of the two synagogues in Minsk (both Orthodox, as are all synagogues in Eastern Europe) and sent me an e-mail address, which led me to Franklin Swartz, the director of a small organization called the East European Jewish Heritage Project, which was engaged in charity and efforts

to restore Jewish culture, and at that time connected with the Dauman Street Synagogue in Minsk. Franklin Swartz, it turned out, was an American who lived in Minsk with his Byelorussian wife, Galina, a professional translator.

Frank and Galina took my project under their wing and made it possible. They found a translator for me: Grigori (or Grisha) Hosid, who had jumped off a train taking him from the Grodno ghetto to Auschwitz and had joined the Bielski brothers' partisan brigade, the largest Jewish partisan brigade in Byelorussia. Grisha, who spoke fluent Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew, Polish, German, and English, came to Minsk to work with me. He knew the directors of the two associations of ghetto survivors in Minsk, and we easily obtained their cooperation. Both associations gave us lists of the names, phone numbers, and addresses of ghetto survivors who had engaged in resistance, either while living in the ghetto or by escaping the ghetto and joining the partisans. We met with the board of the larger of the two associations, and one of its members offered to let me see the papers of her mother, Chasya Pruslina, who had been a leader of the ghetto underground. Mikhail Kantorovich and Mikhail Treister, the heads of the larger association; Zinaida Andreevna Nikodernova, Chasya Pruslina's daughter; and Frieda Reyzman, the head of the second association—all themselves ghetto survivors—were extremely helpful throughout my research.

Frank and Galina also arranged for me to stay at the Dauman Street Synagogue. During my first visit to Minsk I stayed in a small room in the synagogue's attic that was normally used by those attending services on Friday nights who lived too far from the synagogue to walk home afterwards. The synagogue occupies one of the few buildings in Minsk that survived the war, a hulking three-story former czarist police station, which houses the offices of a number of Jewish organizations as well as a sanctuary and the offices of the synagogue staff, and also includes a kitchen and a community dining room. On the third floor is a youth center run by an American from Yeshiva University, there to introduce young Belarussian Jews to Judaism and to Hebrew. A large number of people, many of them elderly, attend Friday and Saturday morning services and stay for the free Sabbath dinner afterwards; many bring plastic containers to take leftovers home. Every morning during my stay at the synagogue, a smaller number of elderly men arrived for morning prayers and stayed for the rest of the day; several of them could usually be found in the front entryway, sipping tea, chatting, and greeting visitors. Among these were ghetto survivors whom I later interviewed. For

me, living at the synagogue meant immersion in the various languages that I needed to practice. Hardly anyone there, except a young American from Yeshiva, spoke much English. Everyone, however, spoke Russian. In addition, many of the older people spoke Yiddish, and many of the younger people spoke at least some Hebrew.

Grisha and I roamed Minsk interviewing ghetto survivors. Few people on our lists refused to be interviewed. Ghetto survivors in Minsk form a relatively tight-knit community, and word got around about our project. When Grisha introduced himself as a former Jewish partisan who had fought with the Bielski brothers, doors flew open for us, elaborate meals were prepared, and I was given books, documents, and more contacts. The fact that I had a small grant that allowed me to pay each interviewee \$50 in American currency for the first interview may have helped as well. I interviewed many people several times. The first issue was what language the interview would be conducted in. Some interviewees began in Yiddish, for my benefit, but almost all drifted unconsciously into Russian once they became absorbed in telling their stories. I taped, Grisha translated, and I asked questions and took notes.

I began each interview with a series of questions: date of birth, education (grade level attained, whether educated in Yiddish, Byelorussian, or Russian), language spoken at home (Yiddish or other), religious observance among family members (grandparents only, other family members, or none), prewar membership in political organizations (Komsomol or none). I also asked where the interviewee was and what he or she did when the war began, and what happened to him or her during the war. All the interviewees were very obliging in answering these questions, but once they began their stories, they held center stage. I could ask questions, but there was no point in trying to exert control over how the interviewees told their stories of what they did during the war. The interviewees were in their early seventies through their early nineties and had been children or in their teens or twenties during the war. A few had been members of the underground organization, but most underground members had already died. Many of the interviewees had engaged in some form of spontaneously organized resistance in the ghetto; a few had been members of the Communist underground. Almost all had survived the war by fleeing the ghetto and joining partisan units in the forest.

I had read the two books on the Minsk ghetto and its underground organization, both by Hersh Smolar, a leader of the ghetto underground who survived the war. Smolar's first, abbreviated account was published in Moscow in 1946 in Yiddish, and the following year in Russian. This



account, which places great emphasis on the loyalty of the Jews in the Minsk ghetto to the Soviets, was nevertheless confiscated, but it was later published in English as *Resistance in Minsk* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1966). Smolar later wrote a much more detailed account that was first published in Israel, and then in the United States as *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989). This account, written after Smolar emigrated to Israel, emphasized the Jewish consciousness of the ghetto population and the relative independence of the ghetto underground from its Byelorussian allies outside the ghetto. I thought that there was room for another account, since Smolar's books did not compare the resistance in the Minsk ghetto to Jewish resistance movements elsewhere, and also because his books were read so little that few people other than Holocaust scholars were aware that mass resistance had taken place in the Minsk ghetto.

Few interviewees had been members of the Communist underground in the ghetto, as most were in their teens or early twenties during the war; most members of the Communist underground had been older and were no longer alive when I began my project. I was startled by how different the stories I heard were from the stories of Jewish wartime resistance from the Warsaw ghetto, and other ghettos in Poland and Lithuania. It now seems to me that I was foolish not to have expected a different kind of Jewish resistance in the occupied Soviet territories. But for me, as, no doubt, for many westerners, non-Jews as well as Jews, Jewish wartime resistance was separate, and isolated. In the stories my interviewees told, their own efforts were mingled with the efforts of Byelorussians. At first I did not think that I had found anything that qualified as Jewish resistance. Then I realized that a different kind of Jewish resistance had taken place in Minsk, and that it was worth learning about it.

On my first trip to Minsk, in the fall of 1999, I conducted eighteen interviews; the following summer I returned and conducted seventeen more. I went to Israel and located the association of Minsk ghetto survivors there; Grisha met me in Israel, and we interviewed eleven more ghetto survivors who lived in different parts of Israel. (I had also interviewed three others, before Grisha arrived.) Some interviews were in Hebrew, some in Russian, and a few were in Yiddish. It was very helpful that Grisha spoke all three languages fluently (I could read Yiddish and also Hebrew, to some degree, but conducting an interview in either was beyond my abilities.) While in Israel I visited the Oral History Project of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and photocopied the Yiddish transcripts

of interviews conducted in the late 1960s with Minsk ghetto survivors who had emigrated. I could not obtain permission to photocopy everything in the collection, so I reviewed all the interviews and made copies of only those most relevant to resistance in the ghetto. I visited the archives of Yad Vashem and found many written memoirs by survivors of the Minsk underground, most in Russian but a few in Yiddish; a computerized summary of the topics of memoirs, in Hebrew, allowed me to locate the files most useful for me and have them photocopied. I had been told in Minsk that given the Soviet attitude toward the Minsk underground no underground survivor in his or her right mind would have put anything in writing, and there was no point looking for documents in the archives. But at Yad Vashem I found many memoirs from the Minsk ghetto underground, in most cases copies of documents in the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, in Minsk. I made the first of several trips back to Minsk to search these archives, and also to conduct more interviews, many with the original interviewees, to ask questions that had since occurred to me.

Meanwhile Frank and Galina generously insisted that I stay with them rather than at the synagogue, and Galina soon became my main translator. At first Paulina Lysiuk, an English teacher I met through Frank and Galina, translated documents from the National Archives for me, but when she no longer had time, Galina took over. Galina and I spent countless days in downtown Minsk in the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus going through piles of documents; Galina translated those that seemed most useful, and I entered the translations into my laptop computer. Frank and Galina also introduced me to their wide network of friends and colleagues. Several times Galina and I visited Galina's friend Raissa Chernoglazova, editor of a collection of documents on the Minsk ghetto, among other publications. Chernoglazova, who had known many survivors of the Minsk underground, answered my questions about the underground and gave me tips about where to find documents and whom else I should interview, while offering Galina and me all sorts of Russian delicacies from her kitchen. With Galina's help I also interviewed three Byelorussian women who as children had helped their parents rescue Jews from the ghetto during the war. A German graduate student, Anika Walke, whom I met through her research on the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet territories, conducted two additional interviews for me with women who had helped save Jews. I obtained these contacts through ghetto survivors and Raissa Chernoglazova. I wanted to get the perspective of non-Jews who had rescued Jews, but I wanted

interviewees recommended by ghetto survivors or other reliable sources, not simply non-Jews who claimed to have helped Jews during the war.

Frank and Galina became the major support system for my research. Galina's skills as translator, and as ambassador to the staffs of various archives, were crucial to the project, and with her help I learned how to navigate Minsk with my pitiful Russian. Galina's daughter Sasha, and other friends, pitched in to help when Galina was occupied with other projects. Galina once jokingly referred to her household as her collective farm, which struck me as a good description. The small apartment where Frank and Galina live with Galina's two college-age children, Galina's mother (much of the time), and a dog who showed up at the door one day and became part of the family is in a massive and crumbling concrete building in a poor district of Minsk. It is something like an unofficial NGO, the hub of an extensive network of Belarussians and foreigners involved in a vast array of charity, social service, and research projects having to do with Jewish and non-Jewish Belarus. Friends and colleagues drop by to ask for help on this or to offer help on that or just to be friendly, and wind up staying for evenings of talk over wine and cake. Through my contact with Frank and Galina, and through innumerable evenings with their friends and dinner parties with guests such as embassy staff, local and foreign academics, local social service and charity workers, and ghetto survivors, I began to get a sense of the local culture. I learned more about Minsk and Belarus just hanging out with Frank and Galina than I can imagine having learned in any other way.

At the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, Galina and I discovered many written memoirs in addition to those that I had found in the Yad Vashem Archives. These memoirs had been deposited in the Communist Party archives in the days of Soviet rule, and so had not been accessible to foreigners. They were deposited in the archives in three waves: some in the years immediately after the war, some in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and some in the early 1980s. Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director of the National Archives, explained that the first wave of memoirs was deposited in response to an appeal from the Communist leadership for accounts of resistance during the war, and in the hope of getting Party cards renewed. The second wave coincided with the rehabilitation of the Minsk underground: memoirs were submitted in the hope of gaining recognition as partisans, and winning the respect and privileges accorded by that status. Memoirs deposited in the early 1980s were submitted in support of requests for the pensions awarded to partisans.

I consulted other sources in addition to the National Archives. When I began tracing the story of the Soviet denunciation of the Minsk underground, and the postwar repression of many of its members, I applied to the KGB in Minsk for permission to see the files of underground members who were imprisoned or sent to labor camps after the war. The research staff of the KGB Archives located twenty files and compiled information from them for me. Anika Walke, who, as noted above, was already engaged in research on the Holocaust in the occupied Soviet territories, searched German archives for me for German reports on the Minsk ghetto and the ghetto underground. The reports that she found were very helpful but relatively sparse. Meanwhile Tatiana Yegorova, a German-educated Minsk resident and acquaintance of Galina's who was locating documents and checking facts for me in the National Archives in Minsk, came across a stash of German documents from the war. One of these was an order from G. Lohse, Reichskommissar of Ostland, entitled "Preliminary Directives about the Treatment of Jews in Reichskommissariat Ostland," directing that orders to Judenrats not be put in writing, but be transmitted orally (NARB fond 378, opis 1, delo 698, pp. 7–11). If such policies were applied not only to communications with Judenrats but more widely, and local German administrations were ordered to refrain from making written reports on their treatment of Jews, this would explain the paucity of German documents on the Minsk ghetto.

In the course of this project I learned to read Yiddish relatively easily, and also Hebrew, though more slowly and with more difficulty. My Russian improved to the point of my being able to check facts such as biographical details and to identify documents to be translated, but not to the point of being able to translate documents myself. All the documents from the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus and many other documents that I located in Minsk are in Russian, and almost all were translated for me by Galina Swartz and Paulina Lysiuk. In the late 1960s, survivors of the Minsk ghetto who had emigrated to Israel were interviewed in Yiddish under the auspices of the Oral History Project of the Hebrew University. The transcripts of these interviews are another source for this project. Two extensive interviews conducted in Yiddish by Yad Vashem with ghetto underground leader Hersh Smolar and with Zelig Yafo, ghetto survivor and son of the second head of the Minsk Judenrat, Moishe Yoffe, were particularly useful. Some of those interviewed by the Oral History Project have also published memoirs in Hebrew in *Minsk Ir ve'Em* (Minsk, Mother-City), a Minsk memorial book published in Israel. I have also used other memoirs by survivors of

the Minsk ghetto: the Yiddish memoirs of Reuven Liond and Abrasha Slukhovsky and the Hebrew memoirs of Anatoli Rubin and Ya'akov Grinstein (though in Grinstein's case, I read the Yiddish manuscript for his book, which is held in the archives of Yad Vashem, rather than the published Hebrew translation). A novel by ghetto survivor and underground member Hersh Dobin, entitled *Der Koyakh fun Lebn* (The Power of Life) and published in Yiddish in Moscow in 1969, was also useful. Shalom Cholvavsky's *In the Storm of Destruction* [in Hebrew], a history of Jews in eastern Byelorussia during the war, provided a broader national context. My sources also include Chasya Pruslina's papers: several versions of her memoirs, an account of her struggle for the rehabilitation of the Minsk underground, and a manuscript by Hersh Smolar on the ghetto and the ghetto underground. In his *Minsk Ghetto* (p. 107) Smolar comments that a manuscript that he wrote about the mass murder of Jews in the ghetto was squelched by the NKVD after the war and was never published. This may be that manuscript.

I have also used other documents too numerous to list from both the National Archives and other sources. Among the more important is a lengthy memoir in German (translated from the original Russian) by a Minsk ghetto survivor named Anna Krasnopyorko, which I found in the archives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. My late colleague Gary Lease was kind enough to translate this document for me. I also used materials from two books about the Minsk ghetto, both published in limited editions: *At the Crossroads of Fate*, a collection of interviews/memoirs by ghetto survivors and Byelorussians who helped Jews, which was published in Minsk; and *Children of the Minsk Ghetto* by Grigori Rozinsky, a Russian émigré journalist in Israel, which was published in Tel Aviv. Both are in Russian. Three official Soviet documents on the ghetto underground, and the Minsk underground as a whole, were particularly useful. In 1981, Anna Kupreyeva, a researcher for the Institute of History of the Byelorussian Communist Party, wrote two extensively researched accounts of the Minsk ghetto; these were not published but are in the National Archives. In 1959, in the course of the official reconsideration of the status of the Minsk underground, a number of researchers associated with the Institute of History wrote an account of the Minsk underground that was not published but was used as the basis for a Communist Party statement about the underground. The unpublished paper, which Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director of the National Archives, was generous enough to let me copy, is carefully researched and extensively cited.

In some cases my sources overlapped: I found written accounts by survivors whom I had interviewed, or published accounts by those whose interviews I found in the Oral History Project collection. This was helpful because it enabled me to check contemporary accounts with accounts that had been written, or interviews that had been given, decades earlier. In some cases the earlier statements were clearer and more detailed. In several cases different aspects of the story were treated in more or less detail in different accounts, and I was able to compile a more complete portrait of the person's experience by drawing on several accounts.

This book is based primarily on survivors' accounts of events that took place during the war. This raises the question of the accuracy and truthfulness of such accounts. In conducting interviews and reading written accounts I was alert to the possibility that memories could be less than perfect, and that some people might exaggerate, or even make things up. In order to detect such problems I checked different people's accounts of the same events against each other. In most cases I was able to find two or more accounts of the same event. The fact that ghetto survivors in Minsk know one another, and in many cases knew each other at the time of the war, was also helpful; I could check one person's story by asking another person to give me his or her memory, or understanding, of what had happened. Minsk ghetto survivors in Israel do not form a tight community like that of ghetto survivors who have remained in Minsk, but even among the Israeli interviewees there were little knots of people who had known each other since the war; checking their stories against each other was very helpful in clearing up details that I did not understand. On the whole, in the interviews and in written accounts, I found that when people described events that they had participated in, they did so accurately. Most of the inaccuracies that I found were in second- or thirdhand accounts of events. I also found that sometimes interviewees left things out, in the belief that I was not interested in details. Sometimes, in going over my notes, I would find a description of a sequence of events that did not seem to make sense. In such cases I went back and explained the problem. In every case I got a more detailed account that resolved the problem.

At one point I interviewed a woman who described dramatic experiences in the ghetto and during her escape, and a subsequent series of adventures as a partisan liaison. By this time I had heard enough survivors' accounts to have some sense of the texture of life inside and outside the ghetto, and there was something about the woman's story that disturbed me. I had contacted her because she was on one of my lists of ghetto survivors who participated in resistance. I visited Frieda Reyzman, the head

of one of the ghetto associations, and read her the list of those whom I had interviewed thus far; I asked if there was anyone whose story I should be suspicious of in any way. When I got to the name of the woman in question, Reyzman said, "Did she tell you she was in the ghetto? She wasn't in the ghetto for a single day!" She told me that the woman whom I had mentioned had hidden with her non-Jewish husband's family in a village outside Minsk for the duration of the war. "This is too much, trying to tell a historian a false story! I'm going to call her and tell her what I think of this," Reyzman fumed. She was about to pick up the phone on her desk, but I stopped her, saying that I was glad to have been warned and would not include the story in my book, but that I would rather that the woman not be given a hard time over it.

This was an extreme case, because the entire story was made up; a few made-up or concealed details might be harder to detect. Nevertheless, the incident demonstrates that lies are often not very convincing, and also that it is possible to learn a lot by talking to others in the same circles. I found that the more I knew about the Minsk ghetto and the Minsk underground, the better I was able to understand the accounts that I was hearing, and put pieces of the same account, or different accounts, together. Often interviewees left out details that they thought were unimportant; the more I knew about the ghetto and the underground, the better able I was to ask the right questions.

When I had finished my research and had drafted a considerable part of this book, I took the drafted chapters to Minsk. Galina and I spent several blocks of time with Mikhail Treister and Mikhail Kantorovich, the codirectors of the larger association of ghetto survivors, and both ghetto survivors themselves. Galina translated the manuscript, they made comments, and I took notes. The parts of the manuscript that Galina read to them did not include the stories of individuals, but rather my description of the ghetto, wartime Minsk, and the flight to the forest, and my account of relations between Jews and Byelorussians. Their comments were extremely helpful.

# Jewish-Byelorussian Solidarity in World War II Minsk

In his book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*,<sup>1</sup> Jan T. Gross tells the story of what happened after the Germans took power in the half Jewish, half ethnically Polish town of Jedwabne, Poland. The occupying Germans indicated to the Polish mayor of the town that he and his supporters could do what they liked with the Jews. The mayor then coordinated a massacre in which gangs of Poles killed virtually the entire Jewish population. Gross's book raised a furor in Poland and elsewhere because it showed the extent of local collaboration with Nazi anti-Semitism. But it also underlined what was already taken to be a central message of the Holocaust: the Jews had few if any reliable allies. During the German occupation others assisted the Germans, or at least stood by, while the Jews were annihilated.

In many parts of occupied eastern Europe this was in fact what happened. The major Jewish underground movements, in the ghettos of Warsaw, Bialystok, Vilna, and Kovno, were able to find few allies outside the ghettos. There were individual non-Jews who risked their lives either helping individual Jews to escape or assisting the Jewish underground movements, and there were small organizations that tried to help. But there was no substantial, organized solidarity from outside the ghettos either in Poland or in Lithuania. In Poland, the Council for Aid to Jews, more commonly known by its code name, *Zegota*, saved the lives of thousands of Jews. *Zegota* consisted of a small number of highly placed underground members who were determined to do what they



could to aid Polish Jews; unfortunately such concerns were not widely felt in the Polish underground as a whole. It is unlikely that the Nazi massacres of Jews could have been prevented by internal efforts. Most of the Jews of eastern Europe were killed during 1942, when the Germans were at the height of their power, and when they were engaged in killing not only Jews but also Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, and others. But if non-Jewish organizations with substantial influence and resources had done what they could to help the Jews, more Jews would have escaped and survived, and hopeful views of the human capacity for courage and generosity of spirit might have survived the war more nearly intact.

The German army occupied Jedwabne en route to the original territories of the Soviet Union (which were outside the western area occupied by the Soviets since September 1, 1939, under the Hitler-Stalin pact). Less than a week later, on June 27, 1941, the Germans reached Minsk, the capital of the Soviet Republic of Byelorussia. The Communist government fled to the east, along with the Red Army. First, German planes bombed the city; then the German army arrived and took control, as it had elsewhere to the west. The Germans were, if anything, less restrained in their violence toward Jews in eastern Byelorussia and Ukraine than in the western areas whose populations had not willingly joined the Soviet Union. In the area that had been the Soviet Republic of Byelorussia (that is, the eastern part of what is now the Republic of Belarus), the Germans rounded up Jews and shot them or drove them into ghettos, which they soon destroyed, along with their inhabitants. In many cases these massacres were conducted in plain sight of local inhabitants. West of the occupied Soviet territories the Germans had gone to some lengths to conceal their massacres of the Jews from non-Jewish local inhabitants. In Byelorussia, the Germans proceeded as if unconcerned about the reactions of local inhabitants, or assuming their support for attacks on the Jews.

If the Germans assumed unanimous local support, they turned out to have been wrong, at least in the case of Minsk. A powerful resistance movement emerged. In the ghetto and also outside it, in the area that both Jews and non-Jews called "the city," secret opposition groups formed, made up of rank-and-file Communists (who, unlike the Communist leaders, had remained in Minsk) and others whom the Communists trusted; these groups came together in a united underground movement that included both Byelorussians and Jews. With the help of this united underground movement, and also of many Byelorussians who were not members of the underground, thousands of Jews fled the ghetto

and joined partisan units in the surrounding forests. No one knows for sure how many Jews from the Minsk ghetto survived to join partisan units, but they certainly numbered in the thousands, and some estimate as many as 10,000, from a ghetto whose population was approximately 100,000 at its height. Nowhere else in occupied eastern Europe were such large numbers of Jews able to flee the ghettos and engage in resistance. What made this possible in Minsk was the alliance of Jews with non-Jews outside the ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

My account of resistance in the Minsk ghetto is based on more than fifty interviews with ghetto survivors and on a slightly larger number of written memoirs, most of which are by ghetto survivors, including members of the ghetto underground, with a smaller number by members of the Byelorussian underground outside the ghetto. These accounts, written and oral, show that there was widespread resistance in the Minsk ghetto, and that it took a different form than the much better-known resistance movements in Polish and Lithuanian ghettos such as Warsaw and Vilna. In these ghettos, as in others in Poland and Lithuania, Jewish underground movements attempted to mobilize revolts within the ghetto walls. Such efforts were successful only in the Warsaw ghetto, where a revolt of great magnitude took place. Elsewhere, however, underground movements were unable to mobilize such revolts, because it was clear that the revolts would be defeated. But given the absence of allies outside these ghettos, it was difficult to find an alternative to internal revolts. In the Minsk ghetto, by contrast, there was no effort to mobilize an internal revolt. Instead, the main aim of the underground movement was to send as many Jews to the forest as possible to join the growing Soviet-aligned partisan movement. Flight to the partisans also became the aim of large numbers of ghetto Jews who did not belong to the underground; in effect, it became the major strategy of resistance of the ghetto as a whole.

A number of factors promoted efforts to escape the ghetto and made escape more feasible in Minsk than in many of the major ghettos to the west. First, in Minsk the Germans began killing Jews in the ghetto and also driving them out of the ghetto by the thousands to their deaths soon after they had established the ghetto. In many of the ghettos in Poland and Lithuania the Germans also conducted massacres at the same time, but here they were often more successful in leading surviving ghetto inhabitants to believe that those who had been taken out of the ghettos had been transported to work elsewhere. In the Minsk ghetto, everyone knew that the thousands driven out of the ghetto were being taken to their

deaths. These massacres, which the Jews called pogroms, made it clear that remaining in the ghetto meant death.

The Minsk ghetto was also easier to escape than many others. On July 19, 1941, a few weeks after having arrived in Minsk, the Germans announced that all Jews would be required to move into the old Jewish neighborhood, an area of about twenty blocks cross-cut by several major streets but otherwise laced with winding alleys. This was the area where Jews had traditionally lived in Minsk, but by the time of the war many Jews lived elsewhere in the city. In their order establishing the ghetto, the Germans announced that a brick wall was to be built around it.<sup>3</sup> Instead they constructed a barbed-wire fence around the rim of the ghetto, and they assigned patrols, rather than fixed sentries, to guard the fence. This relatively lax security probably reflected strained resources: the German administration also oversaw many prisoner-of-war camps in Minsk. In the first days of January 1942, the Germans put down an attempted uprising on the part of prisoners of war in Minsk. As the prisoners of war were former soldiers, and so had military experience, they no doubt seemed a greater threat to the Germans than the ghetto population. The Germans may have been somewhat lax about securing the ghetto because they did not expect resistance there.<sup>4</sup>

In comparison to some other ghettos, the Minsk ghetto was porous. It was very dangerous, but nevertheless possible, to crawl under the barbed-wire fence at a moment when there was no patrol in sight. Many Jews were captured doing this, and killed. The Germans supplied virtually no food for ghetto inhabitants; those who worked for the Germans outside the ghetto received small amounts of food at their workplaces. Many Jews, especially children and teenagers, regularly left the ghetto to obtain food for their families. Jews who decided to flee the ghetto could crawl under the fence at an opportune moment or leave with a column of Jews being taken out of the ghetto to work, and then escape from the column. Jews were required to wear yellow patches on their outer clothes; those going in and out of the ghetto illegally had to find ways of attaching these so that they could be taken off and put back on quickly.

Another factor that made it possible for Jews to flee the Minsk ghetto was the proximity of the forest and of partisan units located in it. The roads out of Minsk led through forests dotted with small peasant villages. Within kilometers of Minsk, one encountered the dense, forbidding terrain of thick, overgrown trees and bushes that the Byelorussians call "pushcha." These thickets served as protection for the bands of young men, most of whom were former Red Army soldiers, that took to the

forests in the first months of the occupation to hide from the Germans, and began to engage in resistance. The Byelorussian pushcha was a much better environment for escape and resistance than, for instance, the forest around Ponar, the area near Vilna where the Germans took Jews to be killed. Many Jews tried to run away from Ponar, but few succeeded. The forest was sparse and unforgiving. With trees widely spaced and with little underbrush between them, the Germans could see for considerable distances and shoot those attempting to escape with little difficulty. Byelorussia became the center of partisan resistance not only due to the extent of Byelorussian hostility to the Germans, but also because the dense, extensive forests created an ideal staging area for partisan resistance and acted as a magnet for Soviet-aligned partisan groups from throughout the region.

Soon after the ghetto was established, rumors that there were partisan units in the forests began to circulate in the ghetto. By the summer of 1942 Byelorussia had become the center of the growing Soviet-aligned partisan movement, and increasing numbers of units based themselves in the forests around Minsk.<sup>5</sup> For Jews in the ghetto, joining the partisans offered hope of resisting the Germans and perhaps surviving the war. But gaining access to these units was very difficult. They moved frequently, making it difficult to establish and maintain contact; most units would accept only volunteers who brought weapons, and few Jews had weapons to take with them to the forest. The ghetto underground managed to establish contact with a few partisan units, but most contacts were made through the Byelorussian underground, whose members had greater ability to move through the countryside, and thus were able to contact many more partisan units.

The barbed-wire fence that surrounded the Minsk ghetto, and the presence of partisan units in the nearby forests, created preconditions for escape. But these could not have been realized on anything like the scale that they were without sustained, organized cooperation between Jews in the ghetto and Byelorussians outside it. As soon as the ghetto was established, Communists and others, mostly trusted friends of Communists, began forming secret groups in the ghetto to discuss means of resistance. Meanwhile, Byelorussian Communists and others outside the ghetto were forming similar groups. (The term “Byelorussian” here includes not only ethnic Byelorussians but Byelorussian citizens of all “nationalities” or ethnic backgrounds. The term was also used, at the time of the war, to refer to all those of Slavic/Christian background—that is, excluding Jews, Tatars, and Roma.) In late November or December

1941, a citywide underground organization was established; the ghetto underground was a component of it and was represented on the City Committee, which governed the underground as a whole.

When the City Committee was first formed, the full name given to it was the Second (or Auxiliary) City Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party. The reason for this awkward title was the uncertain status of the underground as a Communist organization. It was widely assumed among the rank-and-file Communists who remained in Minsk that the Communist leaders must have left a committee behind charged with organizing resistance, and that this committee would eventually contact them. The rank-and-file Communists who formed secret groups in the first weeks and months of the occupation were in many cases reluctant to take the step of formally creating an underground organization, for fear of stepping on the toes of the legitimate, authorized underground committee, and thus behaving a way that could be regarded by the Soviet authorities after the war as insubordinate. In the ghetto, some “westerners” among the secret groups (Jews, mostly Communists, from outside the Soviet Union, who had fled to Minsk and were trapped there) laughed at these concerns and argued that the best way to locate the First Committee would be to form an underground organization. Since the legitimate underground committee did not appear, and the need to organize resistance was pressing, an underground organization was formed with the term “Second” tacked onto its name to indicate its deference to the First Committee. The First Committee was never found, because it did not exist. Gradually the terms “Second” and “Auxiliary” passed out of use, and members of the underground came to regard their organization as the legitimate underground, the Minsk branch of what they hoped would become a wider Communist resistance in occupied Byelorussia. It later turned out that the Byelorussian Communists had been right to worry about the consequences of acting without approval from the leaders of the Communist Party.

There was no debate among those who formed the underground about uniting Jews and non-Jews; it was taken for granted that the different national groups that made up the Byelorussian population would be subsumed within the framework of a Communist-led resistance movement. Because conditions in the ghetto were very different from those outside it, with ghetto inhabitants forbidden from leaving the ghetto, and massacres taking place frequently, and because it was extremely dangerous to cross what was called “the border” between the ghetto and the city, the Jewish and Byelorussian underground organizations functioned

separately to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, liaisons were frequently sent in both directions. Some members of the ghetto underground were assigned to leave the ghetto regularly to remain in contact with the city organization, and some members of the city organization visited the ghetto frequently. The ghetto and city underground organizations worked closely together to send large numbers of Jews to the partisans. Some groups of Jews were sent from the ghetto to the forest; some Jews were included in groups leaving from the city.<sup>6</sup>

It became known throughout the ghetto that an underground organization was sending Jews to the forest, partly because the Germans fulminated in public against the underground and its connections with the partisans. Many Jews would have liked to have joined the underground or to have been included in the groups it was sending to the forest, but had no way of finding it. Inspired by the example set by the underground, many Jews set off for the forest without its help, usually in groups, though sometimes alone. Over time the numbers of those leaving the ghetto without help from the underground increased. Fleeing the ghetto was dangerous, but remaining in it was even more so. Ghetto survivors estimated that of those who left without underground guides or instructions from the underground, two out of three were killed along the way, due to German patrols and the willingness of some Byelorussians to turn Jews in. Some died wandering in the forests, looking for partisan units. Some were killed when they reached the partisans. Especially in the early months of the war, some partisan groups were likely to rob and kill those who approached them; sometimes anti-Semitism was a factor. Nevertheless, thousands of Jews from the Minsk ghetto reached the forest and were taken into Soviet partisan units without the assistance of the ghetto underground.

Sending Jews to the forest was the main, but not the only, aim of the ghetto underground. Underground groups in the ghetto also engaged in sabotage. The head of the Minsk Judenrat, Ilya Mushkin, and most of its members worked closely with the underground; as a result the underground was often able to place its members in German military factories, where they could damage military goods produced for the German army, or in weapons factories, from which they could steal weapons parts. In some cases groups of Byelorussian and Jewish underground members, working in the same factories, supported each other in engaging in sabotage. The Byelorussian and Jewish underground organizations also worked together to create an underground printing press, which produced leaflets and an abbreviated "newspaper" of several pages

providing news of the war, and distributed these materials throughout Minsk, both in the ghetto and outside it. The two underground organizations also worked together to rescue children from the ghetto. Jewish women who were members of the underground inside the ghetto took children under the wire and delivered them to Byelorussian women waiting outside, who were also members of the underground. The Byelorussian women then took the children from the ghetto to Byelorussian orphanages with directors willing to hide Jewish children, or to the homes of Byelorussian underground members. Hundreds of children were saved in this way.

Resistance was not limited to members of the underground in Minsk, either in the ghetto or outside it. Virtually every underground campaign or effort involved some people outside the underground organizations; this was particularly the case in regard to the effort to send Jews to the partisans. The great majority of Jews who fled the ghetto and reached the partisans received assistance from one or more Byelorussians, in some cases members of the underground, in some cases not. Some Jews received help from friends or former neighbors, schoolmates, or coworkers; some received assistance from strangers, whose identities they never learned. Of course, those who were later able to describe their flight to the partisans were those who survived; those who received no such help were much less likely to survive. It is nevertheless clear from the regularity with which Byelorussians offering help appear in my interviews and in written memoirs by ghetto survivors that there were many people who provided such assistance.

Resistance to the German occupation in Minsk was based on dense networks of Jews and Byelorussians; members and nonmembers of the underground; comrades, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. The underground organization was at the center of resistance efforts and in a general way provided leadership or at least inspiration to those outside it, but the large numbers of Jews and Byelorussians who engaged in resistance from outside the organized underground also played a crucial role, creating a culture of solidarity between Jews and non-Jews. The fact that there were many Byelorussians who were willing to take some risks to help Jews made it a little safer for every Byelorussian who took such a risk, and also gave every Jew who left the ghetto a better chance of reaching the partisans than he or she would have had otherwise. Inside the underground organization, such solidarity was official policy, and many underground members repeatedly risked their lives maintaining contact and providing assistance across the German-imposed divide

between Byelorussians and Jews. Outside the underground organization solidarity between Byelorussians and Jews rested largely on personal ties among friends, former neighbors, coworkers, and others, but also included some who acted on principle rather than on the basis of personal connections. Many Jews, while in the ghetto, maintained contact with friends and former neighbors outside the ghetto; sometimes these connections became bases for networks of resistance. There were Jews in the ghetto who never found the ghetto underground but instead joined or worked with underground groups outside the ghetto. There were Byelorussians outside the ghetto who did not join the Byelorussian underground organization in the city, perhaps because they could not find it, but formed their own underground groups and either made contact with underground groups in the ghetto or set about rescuing Jews from the ghetto. Two stories of ghetto survivors whom I interviewed may help to illustrate the networks of Jews and non-Jews, and of members and nonmembers of the underground, that formed the basis for Jewish resistance in Minsk.

#### MIRA RUDERMAN'S STORY

Mira Ruderman was fifteen when she and her family were taken from the village outside Minsk where they lived and forced into the Minsk ghetto (see fig. 1). Mira, her parents, her younger brother, Marek, and the baby, Nyoma, moved in with Mira's uncle and his family, who had lived in the Jewish neighborhood before it was designated as a ghetto. Every morning Mira left the ghetto in a column of Jews; she worked in a German-run cinema house in the city as a cleaning woman. At work she was given thin, watery soup and bits of bread; she did her best to bring food home for her family.<sup>7</sup>

As Mira told the story many decades later, one day when she happened to be near the barbed-wire fence surrounding the ghetto, she saw a young Byelorussian woman, Shura Yanulis, on the other side, beckoning to her. Before the war, Shura and her family had frequently spent summers as renters in the Rudermans' house, as a rural vacation from the city. Mira went to speak to Shura through the fence. Shura asked if Mira would be willing to help the underground. A leader of the underground, Ivan Kabushkin, had been arrested, and the underground was looking for a Jew who worked in the Minsk prison and who would be willing to relay messages to and from him. Perhaps, Shura said, Mira could find such a person. Mira, like everyone else in the ghetto, knew





Figure 1. Mira Ruderman, after the war. Photograph courtesy of Mira Matveevna Ruderman.

that the underground had contacts with partisan units. If she were to help the underground, she asked Shura, would the underground help her reach the partisans? Shura said that it would, and Mira agreed to look for someone to pass messages to Kabushkin. Two young girls, the Knigovy sisters, Tanya and Frieda, who lived in the same courtyard where Mira and her family lived, worked at the prison; as cleaners, they regularly entered Kabushkin's cell. In response to Mira's request, they agreed to serve as liaisons to Kabushkin. A chain of communication was established. A member of the underground would meet Mira in the ladies' room of the cinema house where she worked and give her a message to be relayed to Kabushkin. Back in the ghetto, Mira would convey the message to the Knigovy sisters, who would take it to Kabushkin. His answer would be returned along the same chain.

After some time, the underground found a prison guard who was willing to give Kabushkin a copy of the key to his cell, and to look the other way while he escaped, in return for a fur coat and some gold coins. A member of the underground brought the coat, the coins, and the key to Mira. This was early spring; during the cold months, Mira wore a sheep-skin coat, which she had brought into the ghetto with her. That evening she went back to the ghetto wearing the fur coat, with the coins and key

in its pockets, under her sheepskin coat, and she gave the coat, coins, and key to the Knigovy sisters. But before the coat could be delivered, the plan was somehow leaked to the Germans. There was a wave of arrests of underground members in the city. Someone from the underground gave Mira morphine and cyanide tablets in case she should be arrested. A few days later, Mira looked out of the window of her house in the ghetto and saw German soldiers entering. She took the morphine but not the cyanide. By the time they reached her room, she was out cold. The soldiers did not hurt her; presumably they thought she was dead. After the soldiers left, a physician from the Jewish hospital in the ghetto, which was a center of underground activity, came to the house, pumped Mira's stomach, and forced her to walk.

When Mira recovered, she decided that she had lived in the ghetto long enough, and that it was time to go to the partisans. She wasn't sure if the Germans who entered her house had been looking for her, or if they had been on some entirely unrelated mission. But if they had been looking for her, it would not take them long to learn that she was alive, and come looking for her again. She decided not to contact the underground for its help, but to flee immediately; from her underground connections she knew which way to walk, once out of the ghetto, to reach an area where there were partisan units. She asked the Knigovy sisters if they would go with her, but they refused, saying that they were committed to staying with Kabushkin, who was now being tortured, as long as he lived. The Germans later discovered the Knigovy sisters' connection to the underground and executed them.

Mira persuaded her brother, Marek, who was a little younger than she, and her father to go to the partisans with her. One evening toward dusk, the three Rudermans left their house and walked toward the fence. It often happened that if someone walked toward the fence at dusk, looking purposeful, others would follow them, thinking that they were on their way to the forest and perhaps had connections with the partisans. A crowd gathered behind the Rudermans and followed them out under the wire. As Mira held the bottom wire up with her handkerchief, bits of metal, attached to the wire for just this purpose, jangled and alerted a nearby policeman, who came running. He was unarmed but called to other nearby police; in the confusion the Rudermans managed to get away. They walked through the edges of the city and then westward through the forest; they continued walking all night. Along the way, they saw corpses. Mira assumed that these were the bodies of Jews who, like themselves, had escaped the ghetto, but who had died trying to find a

partisan unit to join. These bodies served as reminders of the risk that the Rudermans had taken by leaving the ghetto, especially without the help of the underground. The Rudermans had no weapons, Mira was young and female, her brother was too young to be a fighter, and they were Jews. They had little reason to believe that they would have better luck in finding acceptance by a partisan unit.

In the morning, the Rudermans entered a village and encountered a man who asked them if they were looking for the partisans, and when they said they were, volunteered to show the way to a partisan base. Mira followed him, leaving her father and brother to wait for her; she had the impression that her guide, a Byelorussian, was helping the partisans in the hope that he, too, would be accepted into the unit. He led her to a partisan base in the forest and to its commander, a Ukrainian, Semyon Ganzenko. Ganzenko asked Mira what her name was and where she was from. When she responded that her name was Ruderman, and that she was from the Minsk ghetto, Ganzenko exclaimed, "My wife's name is also Ruderman, and she's from Minsk! Perhaps you are my in-law." It was true, as Mira found out later, that Ganzenko's partner was a young woman named Fanya Ruderman, from Minsk; she and Ganzenko had met in the partisan unit. Ganzenko admitted Mira, her father, and brother to his unit; Mira and her father were given weapons and became fighters, while Marek was included in the unit's family group, which consisted of women and children who could not fight; they cooked and cleaned for the unit. All three Rudermans survived the war. Mira believed that Ganzenko had admitted them to the unit on the strength of their presumed family connection, and out of his love for his partner, Fanya. Later in the course of the war, she said, many more Jews were included in the unit.

What Mira did not know, at that time at least, was that Ganzenko had more reasons than his love for his partner/wife to be open to including Jews in his unit. He was a former Red Army commander and some months before the Rudermans arrived in the forest, in the spring of 1942, had been a prisoner of war in a camp in Minsk. This was the concentration camp on Shirokaya Street, where the ghetto underground had found jobs for several of its members; their task was to help prisoners of war escape to the partisans. One underground member, Sonya Kurlandskaya, was translator and secretary for the camp's commander; several others had the job of taking garbage out of the camp. The ghetto underground had sent a group to the forest that had joined with a group of Byelorussians to form a new partisan unit. Word had gotten back to

the ghetto underground that the group needed a commander with military experience. When Kurlandskaya learned that a prisoner in the camp, Ganzenko, was a former Red Army commander, the underground decided to rescue him and send him to the forest. Ganzenko and several other prisoners of war were put in barrels of garbage and given straws to breathe through. The underground members put the barrels on a truck and drove the truck out of the camp.<sup>8</sup> At a prearranged place on the road, a liaison from the partisans, Tanya Lifshitz, a young Jewish woman, was waiting for them. The men were taken out of the barrels, and Lifshitz led them to the forest, where Ganzenko was made commander of the new unit.<sup>9</sup> Ganzenko rose in the partisan hierarchy; he came to be widely regarded as a decent man, and also as a friend of the Jews. Perhaps he would have included the Rudermans in his unit even if the Jewish underground, and a Jewish liaison, had not saved his life. But it seems likely that Ganzenko's own history played a role in his willingness to go out of his way to help Jews.

By the spring of 1943, a year after Ganzenko arrived in the forest, when Minsk was the largest of only a handful of ghettos and Jewish work camps still in existence in Byelorussia, Jews were fleeing the ghetto in large numbers, and many were wandering around the forest looking for partisan units to join. Some Jews from the ghetto underground had gained positions of leadership in the partisan units that they had joined; many Jews in the forest were convinced that the Germans would soon destroy the Minsk ghetto, as they had already destroyed many others. Several Minsk Jews who were now part of the partisan hierarchy, of whom the most influential was a man named Shimon Zorin, approached Ganzenko with the suggestion that he form a large family camp as a refuge for Jews wandering in the forest, especially women, children, and old people, who could not become fighters. They also argued that liaisons should be sent into the ghetto to bring people out, so as to save as many as possible, and that those who could not fight could be placed in this family unit.

At first Ganzenko refused. From a military point of view, this was an entirely unconventional idea: it would require assigning military resources, including fighters, to a unit that had no military purpose. But Ganzenko changed his mind. He named Zorin commander of Division 106 (more popularly known as "Zorin's Brigade") and contributed eighteen of his own fighters. Ganzenko sent liaisons through the countryside to find Jews and into the ghetto to bring Jews out. Those who could not fight were placed in Zorin's Brigade, and those who could were

either added to its fighting unit or placed in other units. Ultimately Zorin's Brigade included 558 people, of whom 137 were fighters; of these, 121 were men, and 16 were women. The remainder, members of the family camp, consisted of 421 unarmed women, children, and old people. Zorin's Brigade as a whole included 557 Jews and 1 Byelorussian. The brigade supported other fighting units by producing shoes and clothing and operating a bakery, laundry, and hospital. The fighting unit protected the brigade from the Germans, sometimes by engaging in battles, but ultimately by moving the entire brigade deeper into the forest, out of German reach. Other than some casualties among the fighters in the last months, Zorin's Brigade survived the war intact.<sup>10</sup>

#### RAISSA KHASENYEVICH'S STORY

Raissa Grigorievna Khasenyevich was twenty-seven years old when she was forced into the ghetto, along with her two young children—Leonid, four, and Eleanor, two—her sister, and her nephew.<sup>11</sup> Both women's husbands were in the Russian east with the Red Army. Their father, Grigori Sherman, had left Minsk soon after the Germans arrived; he predicted that the Germans would kill all the Jews, and begged his family to go with him. But both Raissa's son, Leonid, and her nephew were in kindergartens that for the time being could not be reached due to the German bombing of the city, and the women refused to go without the children. Grigori left by himself; he managed to get across the border, and he survived the war. By the time Raissa and her sister retrieved their children, it had become impossible to leave the city. In a series of interviews decades later, Raissa recalled her experiences in occupied Minsk.

Raissa's house was bombed when the Germans attacked Minsk; she and her children got out in time, but all their possessions were destroyed. Over the following month, before the ghetto was established, they alternately stayed with Raissa's friend Katya Kremiez and lived on the street. The fact that Raissa was Jewish and Katya was Byelorussian in no way interfered with their friendship; in Soviet-ruled Byelorussia interethnic friendships, and for that matter marriages, were taken for granted by young people, especially those with higher education. Raissa and Katya had become friends while students at a Minsk polytechnic institute, and they had also met their husbands there. Raissa's husband was a Tatar, and Katya's a Jew. The two couples had remained close friends after their student days. Both Raissa and her husband were Komsomol members, and Katya and her husband were also supporters of the Soviets. When

the Germans attacked Minsk, Katya and her husband had fled, joining the large numbers of people trying to reach the Russian border. A German plane flying overhead had dropped a bomb, and Katya's husband was killed. Katya returned to Minsk alone.

Raissa's documents had been destroyed when her house was bombed, and Katya proposed that she should accompany Raissa to a police station to help her get a new passport. Raissa's old passport had identified her as a Jew; like all Russian internal passports, it gave the nationality of the bearer. Katya said that she thought the Germans were going to be hard on the Jews. She suggested that Raissa, who until this time had used her maiden name, Riva Sherman, might instead use her husband's Tatar name, Khasenyevich, and identify herself as a Tatar. Raissa took Katya's advice, partly because she remembered that her father had made similar predictions about the Germans. The two women decided on the name Raissa, the Russian equivalent of Riva, and invented a plausible story, including a place of birth (the shtetl where Raissa had been born was not a likely birthplace for a Tatar) and an account of why and when she had come to Minsk. At the police station Raissa identified herself as a Tatar on the passport application form. The woman clerk looked at her skeptically and commented that she looked more like a Jew than a Tatar. The two young women responded to this vociferously: Raissa pointed out that the woman clerk, who had long dark hair, looked more like a Jew than she did, and Katya announced that she was of German descent and that she would never hang around with a Zhid (the Russian equivalent of "kike"). The woman clerk gave Raissa her passport, identifying her as a Tatar. This passport probably saved Raissa's life. It enabled her to leave the ghetto and walk through the streets of Minsk in relative safety, and it protected her against charges that she was actually the Jewish Communist Riva Sherman.

When the Jews were ordered to move into the ghetto, Raissa, her sister, their mother, and the three children moved in together; having nowhere else to live, they slept on the floor of an abandoned cinema house. Unlike her mother and sister, Raissa spoke Russian fluently and without a Yiddish accent; she had learned Russian as a teenager, studying for a time in Moscow, and in her subsequent job in Minsk as an inspector in a wood factory she had come to speak it fluently. Raissa frequently left the ghetto by crawling under the wire fence; in the city people readily gave her food for her family. When she was in the city, Raissa often dropped in to see a woman named Tamara Sinitza, whom Raissa had first met when her daughter was an infant. Tamara also had a baby,

and the women had met at a children's kitchen where baby food was provided to new mothers. During the first weeks of the occupation Tamara had happened to come upon Raissa and her children in the street, and the two women had a conversation about the need for resistance to the occupation. This conversation led Raissa to think that she and Tamara could work together. The first time Raissa left the ghetto she went to see Tamara and found that Tamara was taking care of five children, three of them her own, the other two those of her brother. Tamara's brother had been married to a Jewish woman who had died of tuberculosis just before the war, the brother had gone into the Red Army, and Tamara had taken the children. Thus Tamara was hiding two Jewish children.

When Raissa dropped in to see Tamara again a week or so after this first visit, she found a young woman in the house who had just arrived from Moscow. Tamara introduced Raissa to Tanya Bauer. Tamara explained that her husband was in Moscow working with a unit that was training people to be sent into occupied territory to help organize an underground; he had sent Tanya to Tamara to help her form an underground group. Tamara invited Raissa to join the group, and Raissa agreed. The group, Tamara explained, would meet to listen to Soviet broadcasts about the war on the radio that she had kept against German orders, and to write leaflets containing information about the war and urging resistance. Raissa was to take leaflets back to the ghetto with her. After this, when Raissa left the ghetto for food, she also met with her underground group or did other work for the underground, such as distributing leaflets.

Katya had in the meantime found an unoccupied basement on Revolution Street, just outside the ghetto, and had shown it to Raissa, suggesting that she stay there during her trips out of the ghetto. Tamara asked the members of her group to assemble at her house on November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, to listen to the speech that Stalin was to give on that day, and write leaflets. Raissa left the ghetto the day before, taking her children with her. On November 7, after the meeting was over, Raissa and her children returned to the basement apartment. A few hours later Katya appeared, so distraught that she could barely speak; she told Raissa that there had been a pogrom in the ghetto, and thousands of Jews had been driven out of the ghetto, loaded onto trucks, and had been taken to be shot. The pogrom had taken place in the part of the ghetto where Raissa's family had lived. The next day Raissa and Katya went into the ghetto to the place where Raissa and her family had lived, and discovered that Raissa's mother, sister, and

nephew were gone. Katya implored Raissa to remain in the basement apartment and not go back to the ghetto. Raissa refused. The underground's rules of conspiratorial work forbade her to explain to her friend that she was working with the underground and had to deliver leaflets to the ghetto. Katya may have guessed as much; she never pressed her friend to explain her activities.

Katya continued to help Raissa. She arranged a meeting between Raissa and her Tatar in-laws, which resulted in their taking Raissa's son, Leonid. Katya also introduced Raissa to her fellow workers. Katya had a job in a German oil distribution firm located in central Minsk, not far from the basement apartment. The director of the firm, his secretary, and one or two other employees were Germans, but the rest of the staff consisted of Byelorussian women. Raissa became friendly with several of these women, including the German secretary, and when the firm needed an extra employee Raissa was often given the job. This enabled her to discover where German oil supplies were stored in Minsk, and pass the information to the underground, which relayed it to the partisans, resulting in a bombing raid. The jobs that Raissa acquired through the firm also gave her much needed income. After the November 7 pogrom she spent most of her time outside the ghetto. A neighbor in the house on Revolution Street, Vera Ivanovna Nestorovich, took a liking to Raissa's daughter, Eleanora, and offered to take care of the child while Raissa was "at work" (which often meant on missions into the ghetto). Katya also helped take care of Eleanora.

Raissa frequently met friends and acquaintances in Minsk; some of them helped her, in most cases by giving her food, and others did nothing to harm her. But one day, as she was walking through central Minsk, she felt that she was being followed. She was near Katya's workplace; she went there quickly and ran up the stairs to Katya's office. But a policeman came through the door after her and announced that she was under arrest as a Communist and a Jew. Despite Raissa's insistence that she was neither a Communist nor a Jew, but a Tatar, the policeman insisted on taking her with him to the police office, where she found a former coworker, Volsky, waiting for her, wearing the uniform of a policeman serving under the Germans. In 1934, when the popular Communist leader Kirov was assassinated, at a meeting of workers at the wood factory, Volsky said that he was glad that Kirov had died, and he hoped more Communists would be assassinated. Volsky subsequently lost his job. Since Raissa was the head of his department, he may have assumed that she had reported his remark (which in fact she had not



done) and caused him to lose his job. He was an anti-Communist; he assumed that Raissa was a Communist (actually she was a member of the Komsomol, but not of the Communist Party), and he was determined to get revenge.

Raissa said that she had never met Volsky before, and she produced her passport to prove that she was not Riva Sherman, but rather Raissa Khasenyevich. Volsky said that she was lying. The head policeman suggested that Volsky find a witness to back up his claim, and he left. A few hours later he came back with a man named Maditzky, whom both Volsky and Raissa knew well. Maditzky looked at Raissa blankly and said that he had never seen her before; Raissa said that she did not recognize him either. Volsky shouted that they were both lying, but they insisted. Maditzky said that Volsky must have made a mistake. He wrote a statement to this effect, and he left. Volsky went out again to try to find another witness. Raissa said that this was clearly a mistake, and suggested that they let her go. The head policeman said that he was inclined to agree with her, but that Volsky had filled out a complaint against her as a Jew and a Communist who had mistreated him before the war. This, he said, required him to turn her over to the Gestapo. He assured her that the Gestapo would certainly discover the truth. He assigned a policeman to take her to the Gestapo and also sent along the statements signed by Volsky and Maditsky.

Raissa was placed in a cell filled with women, two of whom were ill with typhus; most of the women were facing accusations similar to those leveled against her. After several days she was taken out of the cell to a room where she was interviewed; she was asked to provide names of people who could attest that she was not a Jew. Raissa gave the names of several people whom she could trust to attest that she was not a Jew; she did not give the names of anyone in the underground. She went back to the cell. Several days later she was taken out again and told that she was free: no evidence against her had been found. She was probably saved by Maditsky's testimony, which contradicted Volsky's; by the testimony of those whose names she had supplied; and perhaps also because Volsky had mistakenly identified her as a Communist. The Germans had a list of members of the Byelorussian Communist Party. If they had looked for the name of Riva Sherman (or Raissa Khasenyevich) on that list, they would not have found it.

After being released from prison Raissa came down with typhus and went into a hospital in the Russian district; a member of her underground group, a nurse, came to see her every day to take care of her.

When she was released from the hospital, a member of the hospital staff told her that a man had frequently come to ask about her, but, oddly, he had never asked to see her. Raissa understood that Volsky was still after her. He may have simply been tracking her, or he may have hoped to identify Jewish friends and relatives who might have visited her. Raissa's impression that she was still in danger from Volsky was reinforced when, several weeks later, she went to the home of another former coworker, Anya Petrovskaya, now an employee at the railroad station, to obtain a train schedule for the partisans. When Anya saw Raissa, she went pale and demanded that Raissa leave immediately. "Hasn't anyone told you," she asked, "that Volsky has been showing your photograph around, that he brought Nadezhda Lazarevna Dudo [another former coworker] to the police station, and that she certified that you are Jewish and that your name is Riva Sherman?" After obtaining a promise that Anya would give the train schedule to someone else who would come later, Raissa left. She went to Nadezhda's house and confronted her. "I had no choice," Nadezhda said. "You must leave Minsk. There's no other way to protect yourself."

Raissa went straight to Tamara's house and told her that Volsky was still pursuing her and that it was time for her to go to the partisans. Tamara agreed. The problem was that the underground group had no weapons. Another member of the group pointed out that the partisans also needed typewriters; perhaps Raissa could obtain one. Raissa knew that the director of Katya's firm had a typewriter, and that he was out of town. She went to the firm, took the typewriter from the director's office, and, with the help of a young Byelorussian on the staff of the firm, put it in a box and left by the back door, out of fear that Volsky might be waiting at the front door. Raissa took the typewriter to Tamara's house and was hidden with Eleanora in the home of another underground member for several days, until a liaison from the partisans arrived. Raissa was taken to the partisans but was forced to leave Eleanora behind in Tamara's care. Once admitted to a partisan unit, she was soon transferred to the general partisan headquarters, along with her German typewriter, which she learned to use, producing leaflets directed to German soldiers. Several months after Raissa's arrival at the partisan headquarters, Tamara came, bringing Eleanora, who remained with her mother for the duration of the war. After the liberation, Raissa returned to Minsk, retrieved her son, Leonid, from her in-laws, and was reunited with her husband, who had returned from the east (see fig. 2).



Figure 2. Raissa Khasenyevich (right) and Maria Zhloba, on vacation together, shortly after the war. Photograph courtesy of Leonid Khasenyevich.

#### ANTI-NAZI SOLIDARITY IN MINSK

Mira Ruderman and Raissa Khasenyevich's stories illustrate the extent to which resistance to the German occupation in Minsk involved the intertwined efforts of Jews and Byelorussians (in the sense in which the term was used in Minsk at the time, meaning not only ethnic Byelorussians but other Byelorussian citizens of Slavic/Christian background). Raissa's story illustrates the cosmopolitan quality of life in prewar Minsk, especially among young people. Interethnic friendships were taken for granted, and interethnic marriages were common. These ties led to solidarity during the war, ranging from providing help for friends to supporting resistance. As elsewhere in occupied eastern Europe there

were collaborators in Minsk who were willing or eager to turn Jews in, and there were many people whose main concern was to keep their heads down and stay out of trouble. Nevertheless, the degree of solidarity between Jews and Byelorussians in wartime Minsk contrasts sharply with the much more pervasive indifference to the plight of Jews or even hostility toward them in Poland and Lithuania.

The aim of this book is to describe these organized and spontaneous ties of solidarity and to explain what it was about the history of Minsk and its wartime situation, and that of Byelorussia more generally, that made such ties possible. In chapter 2 I argue that especially in Minsk, the Byelorussian capital city, two decades of Soviet rule had fostered Jewish integration and had promoted an ideology of internationalism that had a particular influence on young people, leading many to regard interethnic friendships with pride. Furthermore, prewar Byelorussia fared relatively well under Soviet rule; the Soviets introduced industry, promoted education, and modernized the cities, especially Minsk. The Soviet collectivization of agriculture had much less dire effects in Byelorussia than in Ukraine, where it involved mass killings and led to widespread famine. Many young people in Minsk were supportive of the Soviet regime and adopted its internationalist perspective. I also argue that there was a longer historical basis for the interethnic solidarity that flourished in Minsk during the war. Unlike its neighbors, Byelorussia had never provided a fertile soil for nationalist movements. In Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, nationalist movements had long histories and profoundly shaped national cultures. In Byelorussia a nationalist movement emerged only at the close of the nineteenth century, and it remained small and weak. It did not aspire to create a Byelorussia for ethnic Byelorussians, nor did it seek to promote ethnic antagonisms. Soviet influence, along with the historical absence (and later weakness) of nationalism, made it possible for interethnic solidarity to grow during the war.

Subsequent chapters describe the German attack on Minsk, the Minsk ghetto, the ghetto underground and its ties to the Byelorussian underground outside the ghetto, and the mass flight of ghetto Jews to partisan units in the forests surrounding Minsk. The main aim of the Minsk ghetto underground was to send as many Jews from the ghetto to the forests as possible, in order to strengthen the partisan struggle, and also because those who reached partisan units had a chance of surviving the war, while those who remained in the ghetto did not. Chapter 7 places the Minsk ghetto in the context of ghetto resistance in occupied eastern Europe: the major underground movements in the ghettos of Poland and

Lithuania were Zionist-led and followed the strategy of mobilizing rebellions from within the ghettos. I describe the Kovno (Kaunas) ghetto underground, which, alone among the major ghetto resistance movements of Poland and Lithuania, eventually followed the same strategy as the Minsk ghetto underground, sending Jews to partisan units in the forest. Due primarily to the paucity of support from outside the ghetto, this effort was much less successful in the Kovno ghetto than in the Minsk ghetto: only about 300 Jews from the Kovno ghetto reached the forest. This underlines the point that solidarity was crucial to the success of the Minsk ghetto underground. Chapter 8 describes what happened when the Soviets returned to Minsk, and how they dealt with an underground movement that had been formed without their authorization.

#### ZIONISM, COMMUNISM, AND GHETTO RESISTANCE

There are two ways in which this book might be misread, one having to do with the relationship between Soviet Communism and Jews, the other with Zionism. The contrast between the prewar Soviet campaign against anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic campaigns of the Soviet leadership in the postwar years calls for some comment. Because this book is about Minsk, and not about the Zionist-led resistance movements in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania, it may be unclear to the reader that I am not trying to elevate the Minsk ghetto resistance over the resistance movements that took place in other ghettos, nor do I intend to argue that a Communist-led resistance movement was in principle superior to a Zionist-led resistance movement. In prewar Poland and Lithuania, Zionism and the Bund attracted large numbers of Jews, while Communism did not. The Zionist Left, especially Socialist Zionism, was especially influential among young Jews. Zionists were therefore in a much better position than Jewish Communists to provide leadership for resistance in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania. Bundists played less of a leading role than Zionists, largely due to their unwillingness to set aside animosities toward Zionists and Communists, which under wartime conditions stood in the way of effective Jewish resistance. The paucity of alliances between Jews and non-Jews in these societies had more to do with anti-Semitism than with Jewish particularism. During the war Zionists, especially Socialist Zionists, did what they could to construct such ties, but found few partners in this effort. A Communist-led resistance movement had the advantage of an ideology that stressed unity and of organizational structures and habits of political work that fostered alliances

among different nationalities. But the disadvantage of Communist ideology was that it could suppress the concerns of minority groups when they did not fit the overall agenda.

Young Zionists played the dominant role in the underground movements in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania (except the Kovno ghetto, where the Communists ultimately played the leading role) because they had large, cohesive organizations of highly committed members who were willing to take great risks and were able to count on each other and work together effectively. The left-wing, pioneer organizations, which prepared their members for life in agricultural collectives in Palestine, were particularly tightly knit and idealistic; they had extensive connections and were widely respected. These organizations also had the advantage of autonomy: they were not youth wings of adult organizations. Except for the Communists, the older political activists were in many cases cautious to the point of paralysis, or even in some cases of collaboration. The autonomy of the young Zionists, especially the left-wing pioneer organizations, made it possible for them to engage in resistance when their elders hesitated to do so.

Zionists led the resistance movements in most of the Polish and Lithuanian ghettos not only because there were Zionist organizations that were capable of taking on this role, but because Zionism had been the main tendency within the prewar Jewish movements in these countries and had widespread support among Jews. The Zionist parties and organizations provided social services, sponsored schools and newspapers, and were regarded by many Jews as the main vehicle for Jewish community; collectively, they constituted the largest element in a vibrant, and politically and ideologically diverse, Jewish public arena. The mainstream Zionist organizations did not expect Jews to move to Palestine en masse, and most Jewish adults were not interested in leaving Poland. Nevertheless, the Zionist solution to the problems of Polish and Lithuanian Jews was more credible than the solutions offered by the other Jewish movements. Few Polish or Lithuanian Jews could support the Communists' enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. Many Jews shared the social democratic perspective of the Bund, but as anti-Semitism escalated the Bundist vision of a revolutionary movement of Jewish and non-Jewish workers became increasingly difficult to uphold. The strategy of going to Palestine gained wide appeal, especially among young Jews, who were freer than their elders to do so.

In the years before the war Zionists, Bundists, and Jewish Communists were often in conflict. With the onset of the war, and the establishment

of ghettos, many Jewish activists recognized the need for unity. Left Zionists, especially the Marxist-Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair, often with the help of the Communists, played the main role in bringing Jewish resistance groups together. In the Warsaw, Vilna, and Bialystok ghettos members of Hashomer Hatzair worked with Communists to establish umbrella organizations and persuaded others, including less radical Zionists, the Revisionists, the right wing of the Zionist movement, and ultimately Bundists, to join these coalitions. Despite its prominence before the war, the Bund played a lesser role in ghetto resistance than the Zionists due to the inability of older Bund leaders especially to put aside pre-war antagonisms toward Zionists and especially toward Communists and join in resistance efforts with them, and also to abandon their insistence that resistance take the form of an alliance between Jewish and non-Jewish working classes. Young Bundists were on the whole less wedded to old antagonisms and strategies than their elders. A parallel division existed between older and younger Zionists: in both Warsaw and Bialystok younger Zionists tried to persuade older Zionists that the Germans intended genocide and that armed resistance was necessary. The model of an umbrella resistance organization, which included Zionists of both the left and the right, Communists, and Bundists, was pioneered in the Vilna ghetto and promoted by members of Hashomer Hatzair. This model was later adopted in the Warsaw and Bialystok ghettos.

The ideological differences among the various Jewish organizations turned out to be a less serious source of conflict during the war than the question of strategy: whether to mobilize a ghetto uprising or go to the forests and join the Soviet-aligned partisan movement. Positions on this question did not always follow ideological lines: some Zionists supported going to the forest; some Communists, internal revolt. In each of the ghettos Hashomer Hatzair members supported internal revolts out of a view that going to the forest meant abandoning Jews who could not leave; their commitment to the Jewish community took precedence over their Soviet sympathies. In the Vilna ghetto the Communist leader Itzik Wittenberg opposed going to the forest, out of the hope that a ghetto revolt would join with a citywide revolt. Young Revisionists, members of a movement that had been fiercely anti-Soviet before the war, left the Vilna ghetto for the forest because of their focus on military struggle, which they believed had a much better chance in the forest than in the ghetto. The Warsaw ghetto was too distant from the partisan movement for the strategy of going to the forest to have been considered as an option for the ghetto or even the underground as a whole.

In each of these ghettos Zionist leaders of the underground organizations did their best to make connections outside the ghetto, with other ghetto underground organizations and also with non-Jewish allies. Each of the ghetto underground organizations was assisted by individual non-Jews who took great risks to give support to resistance and to save the lives of Jews. But organizational support was meager. Everywhere, the Communists were the most reliable allies of the Jewish underground organizations, but Communist parties had been illegal in prewar Poland and Lithuania and had had little public support, and under the German occupation the Communist underground organizations were small, lacked resources, and were frequently destroyed by arrests. The other organizations that assisted the Jewish resistance were also small and followed no particular political or ideological pattern: the Vilna resistance was assisted by a mother superior and her convent staff; the Warsaw resistance by a group of former Boy Scouts and a maverick group of Polish soldiers. The Warsaw ghetto underground repeatedly sought the help of the Home Army, the main Polish resistance organization, but received only meager aid. Apparently the leaders of the Home Army feared that a ghetto rebellion might play into the hands of the Soviet Union, because of the ghetto underground's desire for a Red Army victory. Furthermore, a ghetto revolt might have set off a wider revolt, over which the Red Army might have gained control. The Home Army's betrayal of the Warsaw ghetto had to do with the way in which anti-Communism and anti-Semitism were intertwined in Poland; Zionism was not a factor.

In those ghettos close enough to partisan territory for large numbers of Jews to have gone to the forest, underground organizations may have been mistaken in pursuing the strategy of ghetto rebellion rather than flight. Ghetto residents wanted revenge, but they also wanted to survive the war. In the Vilna ghetto no uprising took place, for lack of popular support in the ghetto. An uprising took place in the Bialystok ghetto, but it involved only members of the underground, probably not more than 300 people, the great majority of whom were killed. If the underground movements in these ghettos had sought to find ways to send Jews to the forest, they probably would have found more support. Zionism was a factor in the underground movements' preference for ghetto rebellion, because ghetto revolts were instances of Jewish resistance, while in the partisan movement the Jewish presence was less visible. But the romanticism of young underground members was also an important factor. Resistance, in the view of young underground members, required



a willingness to give one's life. Many regarded anything less as cowardice.

#### SOVIET COMMUNISM AND SOVIET JEWRY

This book emphasizes Soviet internationalism because of its importance in relation to wartime Jewish resistance. However, Soviet Communist attitudes toward Jews were deeply ambivalent. During the revolutionary period anti-Semitism was a weapon of the czarist right; the revolutionary forces vigorously opposed anti-Semitism because it was the most widespread and violent form of ethnic discrimination in the Russian empire, and the revolution stood for an egalitarian society. During the revolution, and for decades following it, the campaign against anti-Semitism stood for opposition to ethnic/national discrimination generally. For a Soviet Communist to fail to support the campaign against anti-Semitism was as unthinkable as for an American leftist to fail to support efforts against racism. But anti-Semitism was deeply rooted in Russian society. The revolution emancipated Jews by overturning the laws that had confined them geographically and in other respects. But Jews did not easily fit the Soviet agenda. Though most were poor, many continued to follow occupations (artisans, shopkeepers) that left them outside the Soviet definition of the proletariat. Jews' orientation toward education, and toward political activism, suggested the possibility of dissidence. Furthermore, Jews were internationalist in a way that became troublesome for the Soviet leaders, especially in the years after the Great Patriotic War (World War II). As a result of the massive Jewish emigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, vast numbers of Russian Jews had relatives outside the Soviet Union, mostly in the United States, but also in Palestine, later Israel. In the postwar years the Soviet leaders sought to create a Soviet identity based on total allegiance to the Soviet Union. This abandonment of internationalism left Jews exposed to attack as traitors to the nation.

In the prewar years the vigor of the campaign against anti-Semitism had hid the fact that Jews were regarded differently than other nationalities by the Soviet authorities. During the 1920s and into the 1930s the Soviet leadership sought the support of the national minorities within the Soviet Union by promoting minority languages and lending support to minority customs and traditions, at least as long as they appeared consonant with Soviet aims (as expressed in the slogan "National in form, socialist in content"). Soviet minorities policy referenced Stalin's

1913 treatise *Marxism and the National Question*,<sup>12</sup> which endorsed the right of nations to self-determination and limited regional autonomy, within a unified party, and which proposed that national minorities be allowed political expression through regional Communist parties. However, Stalin's definition of a nation required settlement in a common territory. The Jews of the Russian empire were scattered through the cities and towns of Lithuania, Ukraine, and Byelorussia, and to a lesser extent other areas. They did not comprise a majority in any region of what would become the Soviet Union. In the years leading up to the (failed) Revolution of 1905, when the Bund led Jewish revolutionary activity, it had demanded the right to represent the Jewish working class within the context of the Russian Social Democratic Party. Lenin rejected this demand.

Though Lenin's decision was based on political calculations, not anti-Semitism, it coincided with the view, later reinforced by Stalin's treatise on the national question, that while other national minorities were building blocks of the Soviet Union, for Jews to become truly Soviet they must cease to be Jews. This was consonant with a view of Jewish identity as reducible to religion, and also with the view of Jewish culture as bourgeois or petit bourgeois. Either of these views of Jewish culture set it at odds with Soviet culture. During the 1920s and 1930s the Soviets insisted that Jews must be treated equally with others, but as individuals, not as a collectivity among other collectivities. Many young, urban Jews applauded this policy: they wanted education and the opportunity to rise in society; they were inspired by Soviet internationalism and proud to be part of a multinational society in which anti-Semitism was frowned upon. Many were willing to accept the Soviet view of Jewish identity as a private or family matter.

During the postwar years Stalin and those around him embarked upon a campaign against Soviet Jews, and in particular against influential Jewish intellectuals and professionals. What was referred to as the antic cosmopolitan campaign was at first directed at Soviet intellectuals generally (among whom were many Jews) but soon came to be focused on Jews in particular. The term "rootless intellectuals," which was used to describe those whose influence was to be eradicated, was widely understood to mean Jewish intellectuals. The antic cosmopolitan campaign began in earnest with the assassination of Solomon Mikhoels on January 19, 1948. Mikhoels was the director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater and the head of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which had been formed during the war with official approval to seek support for the

Soviet Union in its struggle against Nazi Germany from Jews around the world, and especially in the United States. The Committee had attracted leading Jewish writers and intellectuals; in the wake of Mikhoels's death fifteen leaders of the Committee were arrested, and in a secret trial in July 1952 thirteen were condemned to death. Meanwhile, thousands of other Jews were arrested, among them many writers and intellectuals.

On January 13, 1953, nine prominent Soviet doctors, six of them Jews, were arrested and accused of plotting to murder Soviet officials by medical means. In the wake of these arrests many Jewish doctors and other professionals lost their jobs, public meetings were called to warn the population of the threat, and Jews were insulted and attacked in public places. There were reports from credible sources (though never proven) that Stalin had established camps for Jews and that a mass deportation was planned. On March 4, 1953, Stalin died, before the trial of the accused doctors began. Reports on the case disappeared from the newspapers, and a month later the charges were officially dropped. The rumored deportation did not take place.

Jews were not the only group of Soviets persecuted during the war and after. Small national minorities suffered forced removals from their homelands and deportations to inhospitable destinations. Soviets, mostly young people, whom the Germans had forcibly taken to Germany to work during the war, were discriminated against upon their postwar return to the Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities regarded those who had remained in occupied territory during the war with suspicion, as if their having lived under German rule made them collaborators. Postwar official discrimination against Jews emanated from the Soviet leadership's abandonment of internationalism and adoption of a narrow nationalism and a fortress mentality, but it was also one of many instances of official discrimination carried out during Stalin's years of escalating paranoia before his death.

Literature on resistance to the Holocaust, and for that matter on the Holocaust itself, in the occupied Soviet territories is extremely scanty, in sharp contrast to the voluminous literature on Holocaust resistance (and on the Holocaust generally) outside the Soviet territories, especially in Poland and Lithuania. There are dozens of books about the Warsaw ghetto uprising and more than a dozen on the Vilna ghetto and its underground movement. The number of articles on these topics is even greater.<sup>13</sup> The literature on the Minsk ghetto and its underground is by comparison miniscule, consisting of two memoir/histories by Hersh Smolar, a surviving leader of the ghetto underground, and a recent monograph in Hebrew by Dan Zhits.<sup>14</sup> The vast discrepancy between literature on, and public

knowledge of, Holocaust resistance inside and outside the Soviet territories has in part to do with where ghetto survivors settled after the war. Most survivors of Polish and Lithuanian ghettos emigrated to North America or to Palestine, where many wrote about their experiences. Most Soviet Jews remained in the Soviet Union, where anti-Jewish campaigns promoted by the Soviet leadership made it difficult if not dangerous to discuss wartime experiences in the ghetto in public. It was considerably more difficult for Western historians to conduct research on the Holocaust inside than outside the Soviet Union. Meanwhile in the Cold War/McCarthyite United States, Communists had come to be understood as enemies of freedom, more or less interchangeable with Nazis; given these assumptions, stories about Communist-led anti-Nazi movements, Jewish or otherwise, would likely have been met with bewilderment. American Jews were more likely to be aware that in eastern Europe, inside and outside the Soviet territories, Jewish Communists had played a part in the struggle against fascism. But mainstream Jewish circles in the United States veered sharply to the right in the postwar years. In these circles the story of a Communist-led ghetto underground movement would have been met with embarrassment if not fear. Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Holocaust in the Soviet territories, and Jewish resistance to it, remained marginal to public awareness. Now that the Cold War is definitively over, I hope that the story of the Minsk ghetto and its underground movement can be considered on its own terms.

## Why Minsk Was Different

Very few Jews from the Minsk ghetto reached the forest and were accepted into partisan units without direct or indirect help from Byelorussians. Those who fled in groups organized by the underground and those who fled on their own benefited from such assistance in different ways. Over time the proportions of these categories shifted. In the early months of the ghetto's existence, especially from August 1941, when the ghetto was established, until March 2, 1942, when the Germans conducted their third major pogrom, in which they massacred some 6,000 ghetto inhabitants, most of those who fled the ghetto and reached partisan units did so in groups sent to the forest by the ghetto underground, with the help of the Byelorussian underground. After the pogrom of March 2, 1942, the numbers of those leaving the ghetto on their own, without the assistance of the underground, accelerated, and after the fourth major pogrom, which took place July 28–31, 1942, their numbers accelerated still further. By the fall of 1942 most members of the ghetto underground who had managed to survive to this point had left for the forest and had joined partisan units; the flight from the ghetto was by this time mostly spontaneous, or, in the language of the underground, “private,” as opposed to “organized.” Those who left the ghetto in groups organized by the underground benefited from the ghetto underground's ties with the Byelorussian underground. Until late March 1942, when a wave of arrests destroyed the City Committee, which was the leading body of the Minsk underground, many such groups were led to the forest by guides

appointed by the city underground. The ghetto underground had contacts with only a few partisan units; the much wider contacts of the city underground increased the options for Jews leaving the ghetto.

Those who fled the ghetto on their own benefited indirectly from the ties between the ghetto and city underground organizations. Jews who left the ghetto on their own often headed for partisan units that underground members from the ghetto had already joined; many followed paths through the forest that underground groups were rumored to have taken. The ghetto underground, whose influence was enhanced by its ties to the Byelorussian underground, was often instrumental in the acceptance of “unorganized” Jews into partisan units. Furthermore, most Jews who left the ghetto and succeeded in reaching partisan units had the help of one or more individual Byelorussians along the way. Some Byelorussians hid Jewish friends or acquaintances in their homes until partisan liaisons arrived to take them to the forest; some accompanied Jewish friends to partisan territory; some Byelorussians, encountering Jews fleeing the ghetto on the streets of Minsk or on roads outside it, told them how to avoid German checkpoints or which route to take to find a partisan unit. Leaders of the ghetto underground who reached the forest estimated that 10,000 Jews from the Minsk ghetto escaped the ghetto and were accepted into partisan units, and that approximately half that number survived the war.<sup>1</sup>

There were practical reasons why so many Jews escaped the Minsk ghetto. It was more porous than most other ghettos, as it was enclosed by a barbed-wire fence rather than a brick wall. In addition, its fence was guarded by patrols rather than by fixed sentries. Thus it was possible, though very dangerous, to leave the Minsk ghetto. Also, there were partisan units in the forest. Despite the obstacles to finding and joining these units, this at least meant that there were potential destinations for Jews who escaped the ghetto. But for thousands of Jews to escape the ghetto, reach the forest, and join partisan units, they had to have allies outside the ghetto: partisan units that would accept them, however reluctantly, and Byelorussians who would assist them in reaching partisan units. Jews escaped from other ghettos as well and survived the war, usually with the help of non-Jews. In his book *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945*,<sup>2</sup> Gunnar S. Paulsson estimates that 28,000 Jews hid in Warsaw during the war. Some were residents of Warsaw who never went into the ghetto, and some were refugees from elsewhere in Poland, but many had slipped out of the ghetto during its early months, when leaving was relatively easy if one had somewhere to go outside.

The fact that the Warsaw ghetto was five times or more the size of the Minsk ghetto, which at its height had a population of approximately 100,000, puts the Minsk and Warsaw figures in perspective: the proportion of the Minsk ghetto population that escaped the ghetto and survived to fight the Nazis was proportionately much higher. In Warsaw, individuals outside the ghetto, and some small underground organizations, helped Jews escape and find hiding places. Minsk was the only city in which a substantial underground organization outside the ghetto worked with a ghetto underground toward this end. It is impossible to count the numbers of individual non-Jews who helped Jews escape. We have the stories of only a fraction of survivors, and many of those who escaped the ghetto were subsequently killed. Nevertheless, the regularity with which Jews who escaped the Minsk ghetto report having been helped by Byelorussians suggests that the proportion of Byelorussians in Minsk who helped in this way was unusually large.

What explains the extraordinary collaboration between Jews and Byelorussians in Minsk? Three factors, two very closely related, contributed to this partnership. First, the Minsk underground was a vehicle for cooperation between Jewish and Byelorussian resistance. Because the underground was organized and led by Communists and governed by Communist ideology, joint resistance and mutual assistance were taken for granted. Second, Minsk had been under Soviet rule for two decades before the war. Soviet-promoted Jewish assimilation had strengthened ties between Jews and Byelorussians, and these became bases for aid and mutual resistance during the war. As Byelorussia's capital and as a major focus of Soviet efforts toward industrialization and modernization, Minsk by the time of the war was very much a Soviet city, in which the influence of Soviet culture was strong. The Soviet ideology of internationalism had taken hold, especially among young people, many of whom regarded interethnic bonds as not just a fact but as evidence of modern, progressive views, as something to be proud of. From this perspective, wartime solidarity between Byelorussians and Jews was inseparable from patriotism. None of this is meant to deny that Soviet rule also had a massive negative impact on Byelorussian Jews as well as on others, and that Soviet pressures toward Jewish assimilation had negative as well as positive effects. But Soviet internationalism, and the Soviet promotion of "the friendship of groups of different nationalities," as the often-repeated slogan put it, created a basis for wartime solidarity.

The impact of Soviet rule, however, does not completely explain the degree of Jewish/non-Jewish collaboration in wartime Minsk. Eastern

Ukraine was under Soviet rule during the same years as eastern Byelorussia; yet there was neither joint organized resistance in eastern Ukraine nor any record of individual assistance there on the level that took place in Minsk. It is difficult to make a direct comparison. Minsk was the longest-lasting ghetto in the occupied Soviet territories; in Kiev and Odessa, the two major centers of Jewish population in formerly Soviet Ukraine, there were neither ghettos nor Jewish resistance movements. In Kiev, the Germans massacred 34,000 at Babi Yar September 29–30, 1941, and thousands more subsequently. Probably around 120,000 Jews who had not managed to flee before the Germans arrived escaped these massacres, but few survived the war. Virtually the entire Jewish population in Odessa was massacred during October 1941. Individual Ukrainians hid Jews or helped them in other ways, and there was some organized assistance, mostly from religious organizations, especially the Uniate Church and the Baptists. Toward the end of the war and after, a resurgence of violent anti-Semitism took place in Ukraine. For several centuries Ukraine had been the main center of anti-Semitic violence in eastern Europe, and two decades of Soviet rule did not eradicate the effects of this history.

Soviet internationalism is a third factor that contributed to wartime solidarity in Minsk. It built upon a long-standing current in Byelorussian history and culture of what were for the region relatively good relations between Jews and Byelorussians. In addition, nationalism, a major source of anti-Semitism elsewhere, was virtually nonexistent in Byelorussia. It may be worthwhile to remind the reader at this point that the term “Byelorussian” was used in various ways at the time of the war, and before, in Byelorussia: it could be used to mean either ethnic Byelorussians or Byelorussian citizens (members of all ethnic groups residing in Byelorussia). It was also used in a more informal way to refer to those of Slavic and Christian backgrounds, including ethnic Russians, Poles, and others, as well as Byelorussians. In this usage Jews, Tatars, and Roma fell on the other side of the line. Thus during the war people spoke of Jews and Byelorussians, and the Jewish and the Byelorussian underground organizations, without meaning to imply that Jews were not Byelorussians. The acceptance of Jews as Byelorussians set Byelorussia apart from its neighbors: it was considerably less clear that Jews in Poland were Poles, or that Jews in Lithuania were Lithuanians.

Throughout eastern Europe Orthodox versions of Christianity were, for centuries, the main vehicles for anti-Semitism, and Byelorussia was as Christian as the rest of the region. But in the modern period, nationalist



movements also promoted anti-Semitism, and by the turn of the twentieth century, right-wing nationalist movements had become the driving force behind anti-Semitism throughout the region. Not all nationalism was anti-Semitic: many Polish Jews supported the progressive vision of early Polish nationalism. In the early twentieth century, however, eastern European nationalist movements were predominately right wing, with mono-ethnic social visions, deeply averse to radicalism, and prone to cast Jews as outsiders, revolutionaries, or, in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, supporters of the Soviet Union, and traitors to the societies in which they lived.

Byelorussia stood apart from the rest of the region: nationalism did not take hold there until the turn of the twentieth century, and it never became the crusading force that it was elsewhere in the region. A nationalist movement formed in Byelorussia at the turn of the century but remained small and lacked power. It aligned itself with the social democratic currents dominant in Byelorussian politics at that time and envisioned a multinational Byelorussian state. During the Soviet period, despite widespread discontent with aspects of Soviet rule, anti-Communism never took organized form. The two charges that right-wing nationalist movements made against Jews elsewhere—that they were not legitimate members of the nation and that they were Communist or pro-Communist—lacked traction in Byelorussia. Needless to say, this explanation for wartime solidarity is speculative. My research is on wartime Minsk, not on the centuries of Byelorussian history that preceded Soviet rule. Relations between Jews and Byelorussians outside Minsk, even during the war, are peripheral to my study. Yet it seems worthwhile to examine the cultural/historical background of the cooperation that took place in Minsk during the war. It stands to reason that these relations were rooted in currents that reached farther back in history than the Bolshevik Revolution.

I begin this chapter by giving a sense of the texture of Jewish/Byelorussian relations in Minsk in the years immediately before and during the war, first through the very positive accounts provided by ghetto survivors whom I interviewed in Minsk, and then through the published memoir of a ghetto survivor who emphasized ongoing anti-Semitism. I then take the reader on two short historical tours: a summary of the history of pogroms in the Russian empire/eastern Europe and a discussion of the lesser incidence of such violence in Byelorussia than elsewhere in the region, followed by an examination of Byelorussia's unique economic situation and political/cultural history, and of the ways in which these factors dampened ethnic animosities and precluded the development of

a widespread nationalist sensibility. I end with an account of the different results of Communist rule in pre-war Byelorussia and elsewhere, and of the emergence of a wartime ideology that linked patriotism with internationalism, implicitly casting anti-Semitism as their opposite.

#### INTERNATIONALISM AND SOLIDARITY IN MINSK

My initial interviews with Minsk ghetto survivors focused on their involvement in resistance, not on their relations with Byelorussians either during or before the war. But in the course of these interviews I heard so many stories about Byelorussians helping Jews escape the ghetto, or working with them against the Germans, that I came to realize that I could not describe ghetto resistance without addressing the issue of Jewish-Byelorussian relations. During a second round of interviews, with ten of my original interviewees, which were mainly focused on daily life in the ghetto, I asked a set of questions about my interviewees' relations with Byelorussians. I asked each of my interviewees what their relations with Byelorussians were like before the war, and what contacts they had had with Byelorussians while they were in the ghetto, or in the course of escaping from it. I also asked whether they had experienced anti-Semitism before the war, or after the war. I chose these ten interviewees because, in my first round of interviews, they had given me especially detailed and clear accounts of their wartime experiences. Some of my original interviewees had died or had become too infirm for me to interview them a second time.<sup>3</sup>

Of the ten whom I interviewed in this second round, two, Frieda Reyzman and Frieda Aslyosova, were children during the war: both were six years old when the war began. Two were in their twenties: Esfir Kissel (Frieda Aslyosova's mother) and Raissa Khasenyevich. Raissa, like Esfir, had small children at the time. The rest of my interviewees—the sisters Rosa and Lyubov (Lucia) Zuckerman, Fania Astrometskaya, Abram Rosovsky, Mira Ruderman, Mikhail Treister, and Mikhail Kantorovich—were in their teens at the time of the war. Abram Rosovsky and Mikhail Kantorovich were seventeen, Mikhail Treister fourteen (young men eighteen or older were likely to be in the Red Army at the time). Among the women who were teenagers at the time of the war, Rosa Zuckerman, at fourteen, was the youngest; Fania Astrometskaya, at nineteen, was the oldest.

Among these ten ghetto survivors, only two said that they had experienced anti-Semitism before the war. Raissa Khasenyevich was born and grew up in Ukraine. She described her father's fear of anti-Semitic

violence in Kiev, when she was a small child, and her family's flight from Kiev to her grandmother's house in the shtetl of Yurevici. Esfir Kissel's husband, David, a member of the Communist Party, was arrested in 1937 on charges of Trotskyism, and briefly imprisoned; this was the period of the Great Purge, directed against party members. There were many Jews among those arrested, imprisoned, and executed.<sup>4</sup> Esfir attributed the charge of Trotskyism against her husband to anti-Semitism on the part of the authorities. But she added that at that time anti-Semitism was restricted to the government. Relations among Jews and Byelorussians outside the government, she said, were very good. In theory, she said, the politics of the government were good: internationalism, the brotherhood of people of all nationalities; but, in fact, the Stalinist authorities repressed a lot of Jews. She insisted, however, that among the people, there was no problem of anti-Semitism. Esfir's daughter, Frieda, added that relations were good between Jews and Byelorussians, not only among college-educated people, such as her mother, but among others as well. Her mother's two best friends before the war were Byelorussians. Her grandparents on her father's side, working-class people with little education, had many Byelorussian friends. Her grandfather, she said, had grown up in a shtetl that was half Jewish and half Byelorussian; from her grandfather's accounts of his early life, she was sure that relations between Jews and Byelorussians had been good.<sup>5</sup>

All of my interviewees who were in their teens when the war began told me that they had no experiences of anti-Semitism before the war. All of them spoke of having had Byelorussian as well as Jewish friends before the war. Mikhail Kantorovich said that of course he had had non-Jewish friends before the war: Byelorussians, Russians, Poles, people of other nationalities; everyone did, he said; before the war everyone was on friendly terms. During the war, he added, some joined the police and thus became, in effect, anti-Semites.<sup>6</sup> Mira Ruderman said that before the war her best friend was a Byelorussian girl. "We were great friends with the Byelorussians," she said. "We invited them to our weddings, they invited us to their holidays." Abram Rosovsky, Ruderman's husband, agreed. Before the war, he said, he never experienced any tension with non-Jews due to ethnic differences; he added that before the war no one asked others about their nationality.<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Treister said that before the war children didn't know who was a Jew and who wasn't.<sup>8</sup> The Zuckerman sisters, Lucia and Rosa, were part of a friendship circle of teenage girls; one of these girls, Olga Simon, was Ukrainian. Before the war, Lucia and Rosa said, no one paid any attention to who was a Jew

and who was not. During the war the friendship circle continued to function across the border of the ghetto. Olga, her older sister Varvara, and Dasha, the mother of one of the girls in the ghetto who had remained in the Russian district on the strength of her non-Jewish looks, were able to help all but one of the girls in the ghetto escape.<sup>9</sup>

Raissa Khasenyevich, whose story is told in chapter 1, was part of a circle in which ethnic integration was taken for granted. She was married to a Tatar, whom she had met at the technical institute that they both attended. At first, she said, she was not aware that he was a Tatar, because he used a Russified version of his Tatar first name (just as, outside her family, she often used Raissa, the Russian version of her Yiddish name, Riva). Many friends and acquaintances helped Raissa during the war, but the support of her Byelorussian friend Katya was particularly crucial to her survival.<sup>10</sup>

Several of my interviewees had remained in touch with Byelorussian friends or acquaintances while they were in the ghetto, and some made new friends and acquaintances. When he left the ghetto Mikhail (Misha) Kantorovich sometimes visited the people who had moved into the house where his family had lived before the war. These people gave him food. The first time he visited them, soon after the ghetto was established, they had suggested that he visit a friend of theirs, a woman named Leokadia Fleischer. Fleischer recruited Misha into the underground, gave him instructions for organizing an underground group in the ghetto, and later hid him in her apartment for several months until he and she, and another Byelorussian woman, were able to flee to the partisans.<sup>11</sup> Abram Rosovzky said that during the war he had often left the ghetto and gone into the Russian district, and that he stayed in touch with some friends there. Before the war he had been friendly with a Byelorussian schoolmate, Volodya Sherbatsevich, whose family lived in the same courtyard as Abram's family. During the early months of the ghetto Abram visited Volodya several times, but he felt that there was something that Volodya and his mother, Olga, did not want him to see. Then they disappeared. After the war Abram found out that Olga had belonged to the underground, that she had been collecting civilian clothes to enable prisoners of war to escape, that Volodya had been arrested accompanying a group of prisoners of war to the forest, and that he and his mother had been hung.<sup>12</sup>

Mikhail (Misha) Treister, who led a group that included his mother and his sister out of the ghetto and to the forest in the spring of 1943, said that it was largely due to the care he received from his former nanny

that he survived the ghetto in relatively good health. His nanny, Jozefa Nikodimovna Kudak, was, he said, like a second mother to him. While he was living in the ghetto, he often slipped out of the column of Jews returning to the ghetto in the evening, and went to spend the night at his nanny's house, where he was well fed and had a comfortable bed to sleep in. In the morning he would rejoin the column. Once, when there was a rumor of an impending pogrom in the ghetto, Misha, his mother, and his sister went to the nanny's house without warning and were taken in. They spent several days there, despite the fact that neighbors were aware of their presence. When it was safe to return to the ghetto, they did so, because they realized that remaining longer would have been too dangerous. After the war, when Kudak died, Treister visited a Catholic priest several times and asked him to pray for her. He hoped, he said, that God had heard the priest's prayers.<sup>13</sup>

All of the ghetto survivors who participated in this round of interviews said that they had experienced anti-Semitism after the war, except for Abram Rosovsky, who said that he had never felt negative attitudes toward himself on account of his Jewish identity (except, of course, from the Germans). In response to my question about wartime relations with prewar Byelorussian friends and acquaintances, only one of my interviewees described an encounter involving anti-Semitism. Frieda Reyzman said that sometime in the late fall of 1941 her mother had left the ghetto and had gone to the home of a couple with whom she and Frieda's father had been friendly before the war. The husband, who was in the Red Army at the time, had been a foundling of uncertain nationality but was culturally Byelorussian. The wife, Sonya, whom Frieda's mother found at home, was a Polish immigrant to Minsk. Frieda's mother asked her for an undershirt for protection from the cold. Sonya refused; she had heard, she said, that all the Jews would be killed the next day, so Frieda's mother didn't need an undershirt. After the war Sonya brought Frieda's mother a bottle of homemade alcohol and tried to apologize, but Frieda's mother refused to accept the alcohol or the apology. When Sonya's husband returned to Minsk, Frieda's mother told him what Sonya had done during the war. He left his wife. Sonya was so embarrassed, Frieda said, that she returned to Poland.

There may have been more to this story than what Frieda was told. Sonya's husband may have had other reasons, in addition to the story that Frieda's mother told her, for leaving his wife; she may have had other reasons, beyond her embarrassment over her treatment of Frieda's mother during the war, for returning to Poland. Nevertheless,

the story conveyed something about the way in which many Minsk ghetto survivors look back on their wartime experience, and on the behavior of Byelorussians at that time. Although Reyzman described an instance of anti-Semitism, the point of the story she told was that Byelorussians, at least in Minsk, were on the whole not sympathetic to anti-Semitism.<sup>14</sup>

Several of my interviewees said that when they slipped out of the ghetto and went into the Russian district, they sometimes encountered Byelorussian friends and acquaintances, who expressed their support by behaving normally: not expressing surprise at seeing them outside the ghetto, not mentioning that they were Jews. Raissa Khasenyevich spent a great deal of time in the Russian district and met many prewar friends and acquaintances on the street. Until a former colleague, turned policeman, recognized her and pursued her until she fled to the partisans, every acquaintance that she encountered either gave her food or helped her in other ways, or protected her with his or her silence.

Abram Rosovsky told me a story that illustrates that doing nothing, or behaving normally, could carry overtones of solidarity, and also that solidarity could go both ways. Once, when Abram had removed his yellow patch, crawled under the ghetto fence, and entered the Russian district, and was walking down Revolution Street, a main thoroughfare not far from the ghetto, he saw a former schoolmate wearing a policeman's uniform approaching him. Abram knew that policemen were required to arrest Jews outside the ghetto illegally, and that arrest was likely to lead to execution. He tried to pass by quickly. But his schoolmate stopped him and engaged him in conversation. Abram asked his schoolmate why he had joined the police; his acquaintance replied that the Germans had given him the choice of being sent to Germany to work in the war industry or remaining in Minsk and joining the police, and that he had chosen the latter. After a brief exchange the young men parted and continued down the street, in opposite directions. In 1945, after having returned to Minsk from the forest, Abram was again walking down one of the main streets in the center of Minsk and saw the same young man, this time in civilian clothes, approaching him. Now the tables were turned: under Soviet rule it was Abram's legal responsibility to report someone whom he knew to have been a collaborator during the war. Soviet penalties for collaboration were severe: they included years in prison or, in some cases, execution. This time Abram stopped his former schoolmate and engaged him in conversation. Abram said that he had spent the latter part of the war in a partisan unit, and his schoolmate said that he had

remained in the police garrison. As before, the two parted after a brief exchange and continued on their separate paths.<sup>15</sup>

#### ANATOLI RUBIN'S STORY

Not every Minsk ghetto survivor emphasized Byelorussian decency toward Jews during the war. Anatoli Rubin, who entered the ghetto at the age of thirteen and escaped it two years later, published an account of his wartime experiences in which he described having felt hostility on all sides whenever he stepped out of the ghetto. In his memoir he accused the local Byelorussian population as a whole of having abandoned and betrayed the Jews.<sup>16</sup> Rubin's memoir is worth close examination because his detailed account of his experiences shows him to be an acute, perceptive observer, and because he describes a negative side of relations between Jews and Byelorussians that few other Minsk ghetto survivors dwell upon in their memoirs. But there is a striking discrepancy between his personal story of escape and survival, and his deep sense of abandonment by the Byelorussian population as a whole. Rubin, like most Jews who escaped the ghetto and survived the war, did so with the help of Byelorussians who took risks on his behalf.

Anatoli Rubin was thirteen years old when he and his family entered the Minsk ghetto. On the morning of November 20, 1941, the day of the second major pogrom in the ghetto, the house where the Rubin family lived was surrounded. The family was forced out of the house and into a column of Jews being led to their deaths. Anatoli and his family knew what had happened to the Jews who had been led out of the ghetto during the pogrom of November 7, less than two weeks earlier; they knew they were being led to their deaths. Tamar, Anatoli's older sister, managed to jump out of the column without being noticed by the police. She ducked into a nearby courtyard and from there, Anatoli later learned, made her way through the ghetto and out of it, into the Russian district. She joined the underground, with which she was apparently already in contact. She was later arrested and executed. As the column turned a corner, Anatoli was able to follow his sister's example. He, too, jumped out of the column, unnoticed by the police, and ran from courtyard to courtyard to the ghetto fence. He took off his yellow patch, put it in his pocket, and crawled under the fence.

Once outside the ghetto Anatoli was not sure where to go. He had acquaintances in the Russian district, but he did not want to go to them

and test their willingness to protect him. Wandering through the quiet streets just outside the ghetto, he found himself by the Komsomolskaya Lake, a popular recreation spot on the northern edge of the city. In his memoir he recollected his thoughts as he stood on the shore of the lake: "I am in the city where I was born and grew up. I used to enjoy myself in this lake, swimming, sunbathing, playing games. . . . And now, I suddenly feel hostility from all sides. It has all changed; the masks have fallen off. It seems to me that even the trees, the benches, and everything around me looks at me with hatred, and points at me, saying *Zhid, Zhid!*"<sup>17</sup> Having no place to go, Anatoli returned to the ghetto. His immediate family was gone. He moved in with an aunt who lived on a ghetto street that had not been touched by either of the recent pogroms.

In his memoir Rubin frequently reiterated his view that the Jews were surrounded by hostility. The animosity of local people, he wrote, was harder to take than that of the Germans, which he regarded as "natural." He described incidents in which Byelorussian police attacked Jews in the columns that they were leading in and out of the ghetto. He described some of these as expressions of personal resentments: a former student, now a Byelorussian policeman, who attacked a Jew who had been his teacher for bad grades received in the past; a policeman who attacked a Jewish woman doctor for some unknown reason.<sup>18</sup> He wrote of having heard Byelorussians call out to Jews who were being marched out of the ghetto that the Jewish storekeepers had lived off the Byelorussians before the war, that Jews had not worked as hard as the Byelorussians, and that now the tables were turned.<sup>19</sup> He described an incident he had heard of involving a group of Jews hiding in the basement of a house that was at first within the ghetto and then became part of the Russian district, when the Germans contracted the boundary of the ghetto. Byelorussians moved into the house, discovered the Jews hiding in the basement, and reported them to the Germans.<sup>20</sup>

But Rubin's own story revolved around a series of encounters with Byelorussians with whose help he was ultimately able to leave the ghetto. His first stroke of luck was to be given a Byelorussian birth certificate and passport by the son of a man whom his father had known before the war. While Anatoli lived in the ghetto, he worked at the Minsk power station, which was situated just outside the ghetto, on the shore of the Svisloch River. The river at that point was low and easy to cross. The danger in doing so lay not in the river itself, but in the possibility of being caught leaving the power plant. Many Jews who worked at the power plant left



work to venture into the Russian district and returned in time to join the column returning to the ghetto, but some of them never returned, probably, Anatoli thought, because they had been caught. He nevertheless decided to take the risk and one day took off his yellow patch, left the plant, crossed the river, scrambled through the bushes on the bank on the other side of the river, and entered the Russian district. He went to see a man named Nickel, to whom his father had introduced him before the war. Nickel was a mechanic, an ethnic German who lived with his ethnic Byelorussian wife and their children.

Nickel received Anatoli warmly, though with some trepidation. He inquired about Anatoli's welfare and the fate of his family. Nickel's wife fed Anatoli and gave him food to take back to the ghetto. Nickel invited Anatoli to continue to visit him. He said that he hoped for a Soviet victory, and, despite the fact that he was an ethnic German, he was sure that he had nothing to fear from it: his conscience was clear, he said. He had not assisted the German occupiers in any way. Anatoli visited often. Nickel's wife fed him, and Anatoli reciprocated by often bringing broken items that he had found, which Nickel could repair and sell. One day Nickel's son found a lost wallet on the street with papers in it, including the birth certificate and passport of a young Byelorussian man. There was a photograph with the passport. The photo was poorly focused, and somewhat indistinct, but the face resembled Anatoli's. Nickel's son gave the wallet to Anatoli, saying that perhaps the birth certificate and passport might be useful to him. The date on the birth certificate was too early to be Anatoli's, and carrying this document would have placed him in danger of military recruitment. Nickel altered the date to make it more believable, and safer for Anatoli.

One of Anatoli's visits to Nickel and his family was interrupted when a group of Germans and police broke into the house in the course of a search. Anatoli managed to persuade them that he was a friend of Nickel's son, and that he lived nearby. After a nerve-racking interlude, during which Nickel plied his uninvited visitors with alcohol, regaled them with an account of his German ancestry, and displayed his knowledge of German culture, the interlopers left. Nickel's wife was terrified by this incident and asked Anatoli not to return. But the passport and birth certificate gave Anatoli some protection on his later sorties into the Russian district. When he showed the photograph to acquaintances, they said that it was a bad portrait, but no one ever questioned its authenticity.<sup>21</sup>

Anatoli became acquainted with another worker at the power plant, a Mrs. Shtepak, who had worked before the war as a cleaner at a Minsk

school. She was of Austrian background and was married to a Byelorussian who was in the Red Army. She invited Anatoli to visit her at her apartment, which was not far from the power station. Anatoli visited her frequently. Once he returned late to the power station and discovered that the column had left for the ghetto. He returned to Mrs. Shtepak, described his dilemma, and she invited him to spend the night in her one-room apartment. Later that evening neighbors knocked on the door. Mrs. Shtepak hid Anatoli under her large round table, which was covered by a tablecloth that hung to the floor. The neighbors, who had dropped in for a chat, sat around the table. Anatoli spent an uncomfortable evening crouched under the table, dodging the neighbors' swinging feet, until they finally took Mrs. Shtepak's increasingly insistent hints that it was time for them to leave.

One day Mrs. Shtepak told Anatoli that she was planning to visit her husband's relatives, peasants who lived in a village a considerable distance west of Minsk. Anatoli dreamed of joining the partisans, and, after ascertaining that Mrs. Shtepak's relatives lived in a region frequented by partisan units, he asked if he could accompany her. She thought it over and decided that since his appearance did not identify him as a Jew, and he spoke good Russian (though with a Yiddish accent), it was safe enough for her to take him with her. The two of them concocted a story according to which she knew him because he had been a pupil at the school where she had worked before the war, his entire family had been killed when Minsk was bombed at the beginning of the war, and he had no way of supporting himself there. He hoped to find work in the countryside as a farm laborer.

Early one morning in March 1943 Anatoli left the ghetto for the last time. He took his yellow patch off, threw it away, and crawled under the fence. Though he was on his way to meet Mrs. Shtepak, his thoughts reflected his sense of isolation and abandonment. "I was fifteen years old," he later wrote, "but the two years that I had spent in the ghetto had taught me to look at things from an adult perspective. The ghetto was surrounded by hostility and hatred, and the worst hostility was not that of the Germans, which was 'natural,' but that of 'our people,' as it seemed to us, the people with whom we had worked, with whom we had studied, and with whom we had been friends for decades."<sup>22</sup>

Anatoli and Mrs. Shtepak left Minsk and walked toward the west. It took them four days and nights to reach the family farm of Mrs. Shtepak's in-laws, in the village of Zastroyevka. Along the way they asked people to take them in at night. At this time many villages were full of refugees,

and such requests were not unusual. Mrs. Shtepak practiced the story about Anatoli by telling it to everyone with whom they entered into conversation, and she became very good at it. When she and Anatoli reached her in-laws' family farm, they were welcomed warmly, and Mrs. Shtepak gave an excellent rendition of the story about Anatoli. She told the part about the deaths of his family members so movingly that the women in her husband's family shed tears. The family decided that evening to keep Anatoli on as a farmhand. He had a scare when the grandmother insisted that he must take a warm bath in the tub in the kitchen, and heated water for him. He kept his underwear on until the last minute, apologizing for his extreme modesty. Once in the tub he was alarmed to see the entire family staring at him with amazement, but he quickly realized that what startled them was his frame: they had never seen anyone so thin.

Mrs. Shtepak left several days later. Anatoli remained in what seemed to him, after his life in the ghetto, a paradise: plenty of food, a bed to sleep in, fresh air, and work that he found easy after the grueling labor required by the Germans. One day, while Anatoli was driving a herd of cows along a road, he saw a column of partisans approaching. Abandoning the cows, he ran joyfully to meet them. He persuaded the leaders of the unit to stop and consider his plea that they take him on. He told them that he was a Jew from the Minsk ghetto and that his greatest aspiration was to become a partisan. They mocked his Yiddish accent and scornfully turned down his request, saying that Jews made poor fighters, and suggesting that he might be a spy. They made him lie with his face to the road and ordered him to count to 100 while they left. But Anatoli was not willing to give up his dream so easily. He later discovered the partisans' camp and continued to press his case, despite the growing impatience of the leaders of the unit. Finally one partisan took him aside and advised him to leave, telling him that the leaders were becoming convinced that he was not just a nuisance, but a spy, and warning that if he persisted, they might kill him. Anatoli was bitterly disappointed. He regretted having naively identified himself as a Jew, and thought that if he had not, they would have taken him in.<sup>23</sup>

Anatoli remained on the farm for the duration of the war. After Byelorussia was liberated, he returned to Minsk and got a job in a plant. He got into fights with fellow workers due to anti-Semitic remarks, was interrogated by a Soviet official, and spent time in prison. The title of Rubin's memoir, *Brown Boots, Red Boots*, expressed his view of Soviet rule. He regarded the Byelorussian partisan movement as anti-Semitic and

Stalinist and as an example recounted a story told to him by a non-Jewish partisan named Rosovsky whom he had met in prison after the war. Rosovsky told Rubin about a Jew from Warsaw named Mazurin, who belonged to a partisan unit to which Rosovsky was often sent on partisan business during the war. When Rosovsky visited this unit, he was lodged with Mazurin in the trench where Mazurin slept. Rosovsky described Mazurin as a dedicated anti-fascist who was also an outspoken critic of Stalin and Stalin's police. During Rosovsky's visits the two men would stay up late and talk, and Mazurin freely expressed his views about Stalin. After one such visit Rosovsky was interrogated by the investigative team of the partisan unit and questioned about what Mazurin had said to him. On his next visit Rosovsky tried to divert his conversation with Mazurin into safer channels, but Mazurin did not take the hint and continued to express dangerous views. Leaving the trench at some point on a pretext, Rosovsky saw a member of the partisan unit's investigative squad outside the trench, with his ear glued to the air vent of the stove.

After the Soviets returned to power in Byelorussia, Rosovsky said, he encountered a group of partisans in the forest who told him that they were looking for Mazurin's body. He joined them, and they found the body by the side of a road. A funeral was held, with rituals, speeches, and flowers. Later, Rosovsky met another former partisan, a member of Mazurin's unit, who told Rosovsky over drinks at his house that the partisan leaders had sentenced Mazurin to death and that he had been chosen to carry out the sentence. He and Mazurin were sent to a nearby village, and while they were en route, he had killed Mazurin.<sup>24</sup>

Rubin's stories, including the secondhand story about the murdered Jewish partisan, Mazurin, have the ring of truth. But they do not support Rubin's claim that Byelorussians were overwhelmingly hostile to Jews during the war. Rubin's claim rests on his accounts of brutality and collaboration on the part of Byelorussian police and some others but leaves out those with whose help he escaped the ghetto. The story about Mazurin could well have been true, but it is not clear what role anti-Semitism played in it. Mazurin was a Jew, but he was also from Warsaw, and hence potentially suspect, in the eyes of Communist Party and partisan authorities, as a foreigner. He apparently expressed his dissident views openly; this in itself was likely to trigger surveillance and assassination. Many Jews were victims of the purge of the late 1930s, but it is not clear to what extent this reflected a tendency to single out Jews and falsely portray them as dissidents, and to what extent it reflected the

disproportionate number of Jews among middle-level party officials, a stratum particularly targeted by the purge, or actual Jewish dissidence, as in Mazurin's case. By the time of the war the attitude of Soviet officials toward Jews was undergoing a shift: despite the Nazis' campaign to annihilate the Jews, condemnations of anti-Semitism, previously a staple of official Soviet rhetoric, disappeared from Soviet educational literature distributed to partisan units.<sup>25</sup> After the war Jews were targeted as "cosmopolitans" and treated as potential or real enemies of the Soviet Union. But these events cannot be read backwards in history, nor can official Soviet anti-Semitism be projected onto the Byelorussian population as a whole, and taken as evidence of popular anti-Semitism before or during the war.

Many partisan units were, as Rubin pointed out, reluctant or unwilling to admit Jews. The reasons for this ranged from the anti-Semitic suspicion of all Jews as German spies and the anti-Semitic view that Jews would make poor fighters to the realistic concern that Jews admitted to partisan units would want to bring family and friends to the forest. Most Byelorussian partisans were young men from the villages who had no doubt grown up regarding Jews as very different from themselves, and they were vulnerable to anti-Semitic stereotypes and rumors. Some Jews, like some Byelorussians, did become spies for the Germans, and no one got into a partisan unit without convincing the partisan leadership that they were trustworthy. But Jews tended to have a harder time than Byelorussians winning such trust. The ghetto underground was worried about the same thing: its fear of inadvertently sending a spy to the partisans restricted the number of ghetto Jews sent to the forest. It was on the whole much more difficult for Jews to reach partisan units and be accepted by them than it was for ethnic Byelorussians, and there were partisan units in which Jews encountered anti-Semitism. But several of my interviewees who had served in largely Byelorussian partisan units told me that, once admitted to these units, they and other Jews were treated in the same way as everyone else.<sup>26</sup> There was a widespread rumor, in the latter stages of the war, among Jews who escaped the Minsk ghetto, that the Soviets had issued an order to partisan units not to accept Jews.<sup>27</sup> No researcher, to my knowledge, has ever found a record of such an order. This does not prove that the rumor was incorrect: the order could have been transmitted orally. If the same rumor circulated among partisan units, as it may have, it could have had the same effect as an actual order. Rubin asked to be taken in to a partisan unit in the late spring or fall of 1943; by this time the Soviets had extended their control over

partisan units in the Minsk region. Such an order, real or believed to be true, could have been a factor in the partisans' rejection of his request.

#### ANTI-SEMITISM IN WARTIME BYELORUSSIA

Anatoli Rubin was right that there was a current of anti-Semitism in Minsk and elsewhere in eastern Byelorussia. Before the war the open expression of anti-Semitism was no doubt suppressed, to some degree, because anti-Semitism was illegal, and conviction of it could bring a year and a half in jail. Though there were many, especially among young people, who genuinely identified with Soviet internationalism and rejected anti-Semitism, there were no doubt others, especially among older people, who retained old prejudices but kept quiet about them. And there were undoubtedly some who agreed that anti-Semitism was reactionary, and meant to renounce it, but in a conflict with a Jew might employ anti-Semitic invectives. Anti-Semitism was probably expressed more freely in the countryside, where there was less Soviet control than in Minsk. But even in the countryside anti-Semitism seems to have been relatively mild in the years before the war, at least by eastern European standards. Sarah Goland, who was born in 1911 and grew up in the town of Krykha, remembered that sometimes when she quarreled with Byelorussian children, they would call her a Zhid, but this happened rarely. Other than such incidents, she said, relations were good between Jews and Byelorussians.<sup>28</sup>

During the war anti-Semitism on the part of Byelorussians became more widespread. The Germans hired Byelorussians to serve as their police force. Byelorussian police patrolled the ghetto, arrested Jews whom they found outside the ghetto, and, during pogroms, rounded up Jews and took them to their deaths. Many joined the police force out of desperate poverty, and many may not have known what they would be forced to do. There were cases in which police refrained from doing anything to hurt Jews when they were out of the sight of the Germans, but on the whole the Byelorussian police followed German orders. Some performed their roles with relish and treated Jews brutally. There were also Byelorussians who turned Jews in, either for the rewards the Germans offered or out of resentment stemming from personal quarrels. Forest guides who frequently passed through Minsk and surrounding villages learned to be particularly wary of groups of children at play in the streets, especially groups of boys, who were likely to call out anti-Semitic epithets upon seeing a Jew passing by. Girls, some reported, were less

likely to behave this way. Some Byelorussians entered the abandoned houses of Jews who had been seized during pogroms and stole whatever they could find; others, despite their poverty, disdained such actions. There were also Byelorussian nationalists, who had fled the country when it came under Soviet rule, returned with the Germans, and established organizations that supported the occupation. Some of the personnel of these organizations also held positions within the German administration.<sup>29</sup>

It is not always easy to determine, in retrospect, which actions were instances of anti-Semitism and which were driven by selfishness or the desire to survive. Shalom Cholvavsky, in his history of the Jews of eastern Byelorussia during the war, cites the account of a woman who turned a Jew away from a shelter during the bombing of the city of Vitebsk at the beginning of the war, saying, "This is what you deserve, you Jews! Stalin was your leader and now Hitler will be our leader." This was unquestionably an instance of anti-Semitism. But he also cites the case of a Byelorussian who asked for payment, after the war, for supplies that he had given to a Jew, during the war, to help her on her journey to the partisans. The man's request for payment was not especially admirable, but it was hardly evidence of anti-Semitism. Cholvavsky also includes, among his instances of anti-Semitism, the story of a Byelorussian woman who refused to take a Jewish woman into her home, explaining that there was a man nearby who had been threatening to report her for hiding Jews, which she had apparently done previously.<sup>30</sup> Refusing to hide her friend under these circumstances was not anti-Semitic; it was prudent behavior that may have saved the lives of both women.

When Cholvavsky condemns all Byelorussians who refrained from risking their lives by hiding Jews in their homes, he takes a position that few ghetto survivors would have agreed with.<sup>31</sup> Many recount stories of leaving the homes of Byelorussian friends when it became apparent that neighbors had noticed their presence. Anna Krasnopyorka and her sister and mother left the house of Byelorussian friends under such circumstances over their hosts' attempts to insist that they remain.<sup>32</sup> In the underground as well as outside it the line between acceptable and unacceptable behavior was sometimes unclear. In a postwar interview concerning the workings of the underground, Chasya Pruslina, one of the ghetto's main liaisons to the City Committee, mentioned an anti-Semitic remark made by a Byelorussian underground member. Misha Gebelev, the ghetto's representative to the City Committee, had asked Pruslina to introduce him to Vasili Saychik, a member of the Byelorussian underground whom Pruslina

worked with. Pruslina told Saychik about this. “[Saychik] was a terrible anti-Semite,” Pruslina recalled. “He said, ‘I need to get connected to that Jew.’”<sup>33</sup> But Pruslina’s impatience with Saychik on this score did not prevent her from working with him, and on other occasions he took great risks on behalf of Jewish underground members. Sarah Levina wrote of her early days in the ghetto: “Before the October holidays my husband and I were visited by a very dear guest who had learned, by chance, that we were in the ghetto. He was a former member of the Communist underground in Western Byelorussia, Vasili Saychik. He told us that in the city an underground Communist organization was working, and that there were partisan detachments in the forests around Minsk. He brought hope to our home.”<sup>34</sup>

Bronya Goffman, who worked with Boris Pupko in the Stalin Printing House in the city, secretly typesetting issues of the underground newspaper *Zvezda*, knew Saychik as a member of the underground group to which she and Pupko belonged. When the Germans were on their way to the Stalin Printing House to apprehend those responsible for typesetting *Zvezda*, Bronya fled to Saychik’s apartment, because he had told her earlier that if she or Pupko ever had a problem, they should take refuge with him. After several days Saychik took her to the apartment of another underground member that was deemed safer. Saychik accompanied Bronya on two efforts to meet liaisons arriving in Minsk to take people to the partisans. On the first occasion they were caught by a policeman but managed to escape, but on the second, they succeeded in meeting the liaison, and Bronya left Minsk for the forest. Later, Saychik was arrested by the Germans, escaped, and then was arrested by the Soviets on suspicion that he had become a spy for the Germans. He was exonerated after the war in a trial at which Bronya and other underground members testified on his behalf.<sup>35</sup> Fifty-three years old when the war began, Saychik was older than most underground members; his underground nickname was “the Old Man.”<sup>36</sup> He was from western Byelorussia, regarded by Byelorussian Jews as an area in which anti-Semitism was much more widespread than in eastern Byelorussia.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps Saychik had grown up in a community in which it did not occur to non-Jews that a Jew might take offense at being referred to as “that Jew.” In any event Saychik was clearly not hostile to Jews.

The last word on the question of anti-Semitism in Byelorussia at the time of the war should perhaps go to the Germans, who were doing their best to promote it but found the Byelorussian response to their efforts disappointing. A report by the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) on the activities of



Einsatzgruppen B in Minsk in August 1941 claimed that the population approved of German activities against the Jews, but noted that it was impossible to get local residents to join in attacks on them.<sup>38</sup> A report of December 1941 from Minsk noted: "The masses of the Russian [Byelorussian] people do not understand what a racial problem is; the concept is alien to them. . . . In various locations there have been cases in which mass exterminations of Jews led to vicious anti-German propaganda, leading to statements that what happens to the Jews will happen next to the Russians [Byelorussians]. Those who have tried to incite anti-Jewish feelings have not had any success. The majority of them were discovered and shot."<sup>39</sup> One Nazi official reported, with apparent surprise, that in the eyes of the Byelorussian population the Germans appeared as "barbarians and hangmen, the Jew being held to be as much of a human being as the Byelorussian."<sup>40</sup>

#### BYELORUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPEAN POGROMS

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries large numbers of Jews migrated eastward from western and central Europe to Poland and Lithuania (which then included the territories of Ukraine and Byelorussia) due to expulsions and persecution. This was a wise move. Jews were welcomed in the eastern areas as skilled craftsmen and traders, and for an extended period of time Jews in these areas prospered and lived more or less in peace with their Christian neighbors, despite the prevalence of anti-Semitic beliefs. For much of the Jewish population of Ukraine this period of harmony came to a violent end with the uprising of 1648–49, in the course of which many Jewish communities were destroyed, and large numbers of Jews killed. Jewish communities throughout the region felt the impact of these massacres, and fears of violent anti-Semitism spread. Over the following century and a half wars among the region's great powers, culminating in three successive partitions of Polish territory during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, spread poverty among Jews as well as non-Jews in the region. In 1881–82 the period of harmony between Jews and non-Jews came to a definitive end as the first of what were to be repeated waves of pogroms took place in the Russian empire. Ukraine was repeatedly the center of the violence. In this regard, the contrast between Ukraine and Byelorussia is sharp; Byelorussia held a relatively minor place in the history of pogroms in eastern Europe and the Russian empire.

In 1648–49, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, a minor Ukrainian aristocrat, led Ukrainian peasants, assisted by Cossacks and by Tatars from Crimea, in an uprising against Polish rule and the influence of the Catholic Church in Ukraine. Polish landlords and their Jewish agents were attacked; the main violence was turned against Jewish communities. There is no way of knowing how many Jews were killed. According to contemporary accounts, some 100,000 Jews were killed and 300 Jewish communities destroyed.<sup>41</sup> These accounts were probably exaggerated, but they expressed the horror felt at the time by those who experienced the attacks and those who heard about them in the Jewish communities elsewhere to which thousands of refugees fled. For centuries, memory of the Khmelnytsky massacres reminded Jews throughout the region of their vulnerability.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pogroms swept the Russian empire, and Ukraine was again the center. In 1881–82 a series of pogroms took place in Ukrainian towns, driven by a false rumor to the effect that the czar wanted his subjects to beat the Jews. A spurt of economic development had widened the divisions between rich and poor, and there were Jews among those who had become visibly prosperous.<sup>42</sup> This wave of pogroms touched Byelorussia barely if at all. During the years 1903–6, pogroms again swept the Russian empire. This time they were provoked by reactionary, pro-czarist organizations such as the Black Hundreds and were directed against the revolutionary movement. Jews were the targets of violence because czarist reaction was intertwined with anti-Semitism, and also because Jews were in fact involved in the revolutionary movement in large numbers. Strikes and demonstrations led by the Jewish Bund played a major role in the Revolution of 1905, which came close to toppling the czarist regime before it was repressed. As in 1881–82, the pogroms of 1903–6 were centered in Ukraine: according to one calculation, nearly 87 percent of the pogroms of these years, and 62 percent of the fatalities, occurred in Ukraine. Byelorussia and Lithuania were also affected but much less severely. A pogrom took place in Minsk in 1905 in which 100 Jews were killed, and pogroms also took place elsewhere in Byelorussia, and in Lithuania.<sup>43</sup>

Between 1919 and 1921, during the Russian Civil War, Red and White armies battled each other in the contested area on the western edge of what was now the Soviet Union. Western Ukraine and western Byelorussia, which made up a large part of the contested area, contained

the densest Jewish populations in eastern Europe. The conflict was extremely complex; nationalist and other local groups, as well as the Red and White armies, were at each other's throats. In the resulting melee nearly every group attacked Jewish communities at one point or another, but the Red Army was the least guilty of such behavior; when Red Army soldiers attacked Jews, they were disciplined for it. On the whole the Red Army refrained from attacking Jews, and in some cases it protected Jewish communities. The Whites, and the Ukrainian army, led by Simon Petlyura, were responsible for the vast majority of pogroms. Unprecedented numbers of Jews were killed. According to one account some 200,000 Ukrainian Jews died in these massacres.<sup>44</sup>

According to official Byelorussian sources, 177 pogroms took place in western Byelorussia, in the course of which 1,100 Jews were killed.<sup>45</sup> Eastern Byelorussia lay outside the contested zone and was thus spared. These figures may exaggerate the contrast between the numbers of Byelorussian and Ukrainian Jews who died. But it is clear that the difference was striking. One cannot measure levels of anti-Semitism in different areas simply by counting pogroms. In 1919–21 no pogroms took place in eastern Byelorussia because armies were not fighting each other there, not because eastern Byelorussia was devoid of anti-Semitism. But the contrast between the repeated waves of pogroms in Ukraine, and their much lower incidence in Byelorussia, is significant. Leonid Smilovitzky, a historian of Byelorussian Jewry, despite noting the pogroms that took place in western Byelorussia during the Russian Civil War, writes that at the beginning of Soviet rule “the anti-Jewish tradition, which poisoned relations between Jews and non-Jews in Poland and Ukraine, was little felt among the peasants of Belarus.”<sup>46</sup>

Because Russian Orthodoxy was traditionally strong in eastern Byelorussia, and the Catholic Church in western Byelorussia, it might seem at first glance that it was the absence of Catholicism that protected eastern Byelorussia from intense anti-Semitism. It is true that anti-Semitism was stronger in western than in eastern Byelorussia, that there were many ethnic Poles in that area, and that the influence of Polish culture was strong. But regarding Catholicism as the source of a particularly volatile version of anti-Semitism is a mistake. Neither Russia nor Ukraine was Catholic. Russian Orthodoxy, as well as Catholicism, inculcated anti-Semitic beliefs. Anti-Semitism increased in Poland in the first decades of the twentieth century not because Poland was Catholic but due to the rise of nationalist movements that blamed Jews for the problems

facing Poles, and that regarded Jews as not really Poles because they were not Catholics.

In the areas surrounding Byelorussia, nationalist movements promoted anti-Semitism; in the following section I will describe the political history and demography that undercut the appeal of nationalism in Byelorussia. But before embarking on that history it is worth looking at the Byelorussian economy in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. It was during the two decades before and the two decades following the turn of the century that, at three different points, waves of pogroms swept the Russian empire, in each case centered in Ukraine; it was also during this period that Ukraine, and also Russia and Poland, were experiencing spurts of economic growth, while Byelorussia was not. This is not meant to suggest that anti-Semitism, or the lack of it, can be reduced to economics, nor is it meant to suggest any direct connection between poverty and economic stagnation on the one hand and lack of anti-Semitism on the other. Byelorussia's economy was intertwined with its political development and its cultural demography; under other circumstances poverty and stagnation could have had very different effects.

In Ukraine, economic tensions between Jews and Ukrainians were repeatedly a factor in anti-Semitic violence. In seventeenth-century Ukraine, Polish landlords leased lands and other holdings to Jews, who were able to fulfill such roles because of their literacy and accounting skills. The Jewish lessees then became responsible for running the landlords' affairs and collecting payments from Ukrainian peasants. The Jews holding such positions were few in number but were highly visible. The attacks on Jewish communities during Khmelnitzky's revolt were fueled by Ukrainian peasants' identification of the Jews as a whole with the Polish landlords, who were resented on both economic and ethnic grounds. A perception of Jews as wealthy exploiters was also a factor in the pogroms that took place around the turn of the twentieth century, and again the perception was based on the visibility of small numbers of Jews. In the last decades of the nineteenth century a spurt of economic development, including industrialization and accelerated trade, took place in Ukraine, and also in Russia and Poland, and trade among the three accelerated. The pogroms of 1881–82 in Ukraine were fueled by resentment against Jews who became rich through their involvement in this economic boom.

Byelorussia served as a supplier of raw materials to the rest of the region but gained little from this role; its economy remained overwhelmingly

rural, traditional, and stagnant. Virtually all that Byelorussia gained from the accelerated trade among its neighbors was a set of railroad tracks crisscrossing its territory. Byelorussian trade remained overwhelmingly local; stores in Minsk continued to offer mostly local goods, and beyond that only leftovers from the trade among Poland, Russia, and Ukraine.<sup>47</sup> At the outbreak of the Russian Civil War, per capita Byelorussian industrial output was less than 50 percent of the average for the Russian empire as a whole, and in the area of machine building, Byelorussia accounted for less than 10 percent of the empire's average.<sup>48</sup> Despite the modern two-story buildings in Minsk's downtown area, as a whole the city remained primitive by the changing standards of the region; it consisted largely of roughly constructed log houses of the sort found in the villages.

Byelorussia differed from its neighbors not only by remaining poor as they became wealthier, but also by remaining economically egalitarian, or perhaps becoming even more so, as the divisions between rich and poor widened elsewhere. In Byelorussia, Jews as well as ethnic Byelorussians were poor, and there was no economic spurt to enrich even a small number of Jews. Of the approximately 47,000 Jews in Minsk in 1897, 52.3 percent of the city's population, about 250 worked as doctors, engineers, writers, and teachers. These people had status and influence, but little wealth.<sup>49</sup> Jewish entrepreneurs, owners of small workshops, were on the whole only a cut above the poverty level of those whom they employed, who were in any event, in most cases, Jews. Abraham Liessen, a prominent Yiddish poet, might have been thinking of Minsk, where he grew up, when he later described the class struggle among Jews around the turn of the century as "the struggle between the very poor and the poor."<sup>50</sup> During the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, pogroms and poverty prompted a mass migration of Jews out of the Russian empire. The extreme poverty of Byelorussian Jews prompted particularly large numbers of them to leave. Elsewhere, natural increase made up for the loss of Jewish population due to emigration; in Byelorussia absolute numbers declined, and Minsk and other cities became steadily less Jewish, due to emigration to the west, and during the Soviet period emigration to other parts of the Soviet Union, as well as the migration of ethnic Byelorussians into the city for jobs in the new factories.<sup>51</sup>

Ethnic Byelorussians were extremely poor, more so than most ethnic groups in eastern Europe. At the turn of the twentieth century the vast majority of ethnic Byelorussians lived in small villages and engaged in subsistence agriculture. Relatively few attended school; those who did

mostly learned to read Russian. Because ethnic Byelorussians were so underrepresented in Byelorussia's cities and in its small professional elite, there was no one to promote education in the Byelorussian language. In 1897 more than three out of four ethnic Byelorussians between the ages of ten and forty were illiterate.<sup>52</sup> Byelorussian peasants were trapped in poverty by the poor land they farmed and by illiteracy. Byelorussian rural poverty affected landowners as well as peasants. The quality of the land and the stagnant Byelorussian economy led many to sell out and leave during the early decades of the twentieth century. As a result an increasing proportion of Byelorussian farmland was in the hands of peasants, mostly poor peasants engaging in subsistence agriculture. At the turn of the twentieth century large landowners owned about half the farmland in Byelorussia. In 1917 the state, the churches, and the gentry, combined, owned 9.3 percent of arable farmland, and individual peasants 90.7 percent.<sup>53</sup>

#### BYELORUSSIAN POLITICS AND ETHNIC COEXISTENCE

Most countries have histories whose basic outlines are agreed upon. This is not the case for Byelorussia. It is impossible to identify a date or even an era during which it came into existence, because the territory that later came to be called Byelorussia was incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the thirteenth century, before a collective Byelorussian identity existed. What the peoples of that territory had in common at that time was Christianity, to which they had been officially converted along with the rest of the population of medieval Kievan Russia, and the Byelorussian language, which shared a common root with Russian and Ukrainian. Byelorussia's inclusion in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania protected it from Mongol rule, which the rest of what had been Kievan Russia came under, and until the turn of the nineteenth century Byelorussia remained outside the Russian empire, although it continued to have linguistic, cultural, and religious ties to Russia. When Byelorussia again came under Russian rule, it was called "Western Russia" or "Northwestern Russia." Use of the term "Byelorussia" was forbidden, though out of fear of Polish rather than Byelorussian nationalism. In the years immediately after the revolution the Soviets gave some leeway to Byelorussian culture, in accordance with their policy of supporting the cultures of national minorities, but this later evaporated, and in the postwar years the Soviets emphasized the links between Byelorussia and Russia. Russian historians have tended to treat Byelorussia as a relatively insignificant region of

Russia. Byelorussian nationalist accounts, however, trace the history of Byelorussia back as far as the eleventh century.<sup>54</sup> Both sides in this debate assume that nationhood, or at least the demand for nationhood, is key to a people's development. I think that Byelorussian culture was more inclusive of ethnic identities than other ethnic cultures in the area because it was less nationalist.

In the thirteenth century, when it was incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Byelorussia was not a unified nation, but rather a territory containing three major principalities, each based on tribes. In 988 the grand prince of Russian Kiev had officially baptized his subjects, and due to his marriage to the daughter of the prince of Polock, the largest of the Byelorussian principalities, Christianity was extended to the subjects of Polock and subsequently to the other principalities within the territory of Byelorussia. Literacy was introduced along with Christianity (among the church hierarchy and the nobility, not among the common people). Literacy itself rested on Old Slavonic, which was related to but not the same as spoken Byelorussian. Though the tribes that inhabited Byelorussian territory shared a language and a religion, the principalities, which were based on tribes, were independent entities; there was no sense of common Byelorussian identity.

The term "Byelorussia" did not appear in official documents until after the thirteenth-century invasion of the rest of the region (more or less corresponding to present-day Russia and Ukraine) by the Mongols. Kievan Russia, as the entire region was known, was divided into three areas: West Russia, South Russia (Ukraine), and North East Russia, or Byelorussia. The term Byelorussia, or White Russia, may have referred to the fact that this was the only one of the three areas not to come under Mongol control. In response to the Mongol threat, and also a lesser threat posed by the Teutonic Knights to the west, the Byelorussian principalities had sought protection from Lithuania, and as a result the territory of Byelorussia was subsumed into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By this time Old Slavonic had differentiated into three versions: one Russian, one Ukrainian, and one Byelorussian. Because literacy had not yet come to Lithuania (the Grand Duke was illiterate), the Byelorussian version of Old Slavonic was adopted as the official language of the now-united Byelorussian/Lithuanian state. Under the Grand Duchy, external Lithuanian control was filtered through a Byelorussian political and landed elite, and Byelorussian culture flourished.

Lithuania turned toward an alliance with Poland, partly in response to a threat from the Teutonic Knights to the west. The marriage of the grand

duke of Lithuania to the Polish queen in 1386 began a period of increasing Polish influence over Lithuania, and therefore also over Byelorussia. In 1569 the Union of Lublin between Poland and Lithuania established a joint kingdom, dominated by Poland. A separate religious union, the Union of Brest, concluded in 1596, established the preeminence of the Roman Catholic Church within the Polish/Lithuanian kingdom, which encompassed Byelorussia. The Byelorussian nobility, many of them Russian Orthodox, were now forced to adopt Polish customs, the Polish language, and Roman Catholicism. The peasantry continued to speak Byelorussian, but Polish efforts to undermine the Orthodox Church, directed first of all at the church hierarchy and the Orthodox nobility, were also felt by the Byelorussian peasantry. In the wake of the Union of Brest, many hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church became Catholics; despite widespread official repression of Orthodoxy, considerable numbers of Byelorussians, especially in the eastern part of the country, remained Orthodox, but others converted to the Uniate Church, where they followed a ritual that blended Catholic and Orthodox traditions, and some, especially in the west, converted to Catholicism.<sup>55</sup>

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century Poland was dismantled, and its territory absorbed by neighboring states. Over the course of three partitions of Poland, from 1772 to 1795, the Byelorussian territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania came under czarist rule. The area comprised by Byelorussia and Ukraine, to its south, had by this time become home to the largest number of Jews in eastern Europe. By czarist decree a Jewish Pale of Settlement was established, within which Byelorussia and Ukraine were included. Jews were allowed to live in this area, but not elsewhere in the Russian empire without special permission. In Byelorussia czarist rule also promoted the gradual Russification of the landed elite. Polish landlords were required to take an oath of allegiance to the czar, and the lands of those who refused were confiscated and divided among Russians. Through this means and others much Byelorussian land was distributed among Russian nobles. A Russian elite now entered Byelorussia, and the already existing elite was now at least to some extent Russified. By the time Byelorussia came under czarist rule its elite was no longer Byelorussian. Some of the nobles and gentry were descended from Poles. Others were descendants of ethnic Byelorussians, but a centuries-long process of Polonization had cut their ties to Byelorussian culture; they had become ethnic Poles, living in Byelorussian territory. At first Byelorussia's new Russian rulers refrained from undermining the Catholic Church, but over time such leniency evaporated,



and the Russians followed the same approach as the Polish rulers before them, only in the opposite direction. Catholic churches were closed, the now-Catholic elite was forced to convert back to Orthodoxy, and the peasantry came under similar pressures.

By the time Byelorussia was absorbed into the Russian empire, a different kind of elite was taking shape in the cities, predominately Jewish but also including people of other ethnic groups, mostly ethnic Russians and Poles. In the mid-seventeenth century Jews had constituted as much as 8 percent of the population of some towns and cities in Byelorussia; their numbers, and their proportion of the Byelorussian urban population, were to grow steadily until, by the turn of the twentieth century, Jews constituted more than 50 percent of the population of all of Byelorussia's major cities and many of its towns. After the Jews, ethnic Russians and Poles were most numerous in Byelorussia's cities and towns. The literate, in some cases highly educated, professional, entrepreneurial class that developed in the cities consisted mostly of Jews and to some extent other ethnic minorities. Few ethnic Byelorussians lived in the cities, and even fewer belonged to the urban educated elite. The cities of Byelorussia were poor, as was its countryside, and its entrepreneurs and professionals were considerably poorer than their counterparts elsewhere; the urban elite did not have either the wealth or the political influence of the landlords. But due to its skills and the cultural and other resources to which it had access, it was nevertheless an elite of sorts, and the fact that it consisted overwhelmingly of people who were not ethnic Byelorussians and who spoke Yiddish and/or Russian rather than Byelorussian had an impact on Byelorussian history.

From the start Byelorussian resistance to czarist control involved the joint efforts of ethnic Byelorussians and others. This was inevitable, partly because the cities were overwhelmingly populated by people other than ethnic Byelorussians (the towns, as well, were in many cases half Jewish), and also because resistance to czarist rule extended throughout the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and it made sense for Byelorussians, Poles, and Lithuanians to make common cause. Connections with Poles were particularly important in the history of resistance due to the strength of the Polish movement for national autonomy. Despite the rout that Napoleon's army suffered in 1812 in its attempted march on Moscow, the endeavor inspired democratic and nationalist hopes, especially among students and intellectuals. Since there were no universities in Byelorussia, Byelorussian students attended universities elsewhere in the Russian empire. In these contexts anti-czarist and nationalist ideas

were often shared among students from various parts of the Russian empire; Byelorussian nationalism was formed in such a context. At Vilnia University (in the city called Vilna in Yiddish, Wilno in Polish, and Vilnius in Lithuanian) groups of students explored nationalist ideas under the influence of Polish historian Joachim Lelewel. These groups included a group of Byelorussians who were inspired by the idea of promoting the use of the Byelorussian language as a basis for Byelorussian cultural revival. In 1823 these groups were disbanded, and their leaders exiled. The Warsaw uprising of 1830 against czarist rule over Poland stimulated support in Lithuania and in western Byelorussia, and the following year, when the Poles sent a military unit to those areas, an uprising took place in northwestern Byelorussia that involved some 10,000 people, including peasants and landowners in addition to students, intellectuals, and Catholic (Polish) clergy. The uprising was repressed.<sup>56</sup>

Such signs of discontent with Russian rule led the czarist regime to intensify its efforts to discourage Byelorussian identification, Russify the landed elite in Byelorussia, and draw, or force, the Byelorussian peasantry back into the Orthodox Church. In 1839, congregants of the Uniate Church, at that point about three-quarters of the Byelorussian population, were forced to convert to Orthodoxy. Byelorussia had been renamed the North Western Territory for official purposes; in 1840 Nicholas I issued a decree prohibiting use of the term "Byelorussia."<sup>57</sup> In 1861 Nicholas's successor, Alexander II, attempted to quell discontent in the Russian empire as a whole by liberating the serfs, but since the liberated serfs were given meager plots of land, the measure was followed by widespread protest. An uprising took place in Byelorussia, centered in western Byelorussia, where the insurgents, mostly town dwellers, were in close contact with allies in Poland. The uprising was put down by Russian troops. The leader of the uprising, an ethnic Byelorussian radical intellectual, wrote a message to the Byelorussian people, before being hanged, urging them to take inspiration from their brothers, the Polish nationalists, and calling for Byelorussian and Lithuanian autonomy from Russian rule. The repression that followed included the banning of the Polish language from official use, harassment of Orthodox churches, and the building of Catholic churches. In a single year, 1865–66, 30,000 nobles and gentry abandoned Orthodoxy for Catholicism.<sup>58</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s the Populist movement, which sought a revolution based on the peasantry, took hold in Byelorussia as elsewhere in the Russian empire among students and other urban, middle-class young people. Byelorussian students studying at universities where students of

other ethnic groups were influenced by nationalism developed similar ideas. A group of Byelorussian Populists, students, and others in St. Petersburg published an illegal journal entitled *Homan* (Talk), which supported an autonomous Byelorussian republic in the context of a Russian federation.<sup>59</sup> By this time students and intellectuals in many parts of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania were turning to ideas of this sort; ethnic Poles, now a dispossessed group living under Russian rule, were often part of such efforts. In 1902 Byelorussian students in St. Petersburg formed the Byelorussian Revolutionary Hramada (Union) with the help of the Polish Socialist Party. In 1903 the organization was renamed the Byelorussian Socialist Hramada. The Hramada sought an autonomous Byelorussian state with social democratic policies. It was overshadowed by the much larger and more influential Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, which was oriented toward Marxism and consisted in Byelorussia largely of Jews, ethnic Russians, and ethnic Poles, who made up the Byelorussian urban population.<sup>60</sup> In the wake of the failed Revolution of 1905, Byelorussians in Vilna began publishing the periodical *Nasha niva* (Our Land), which advocated an independent state but made it clear that such a state would represent not only ethnic Byelorussians but other ethnic groups in Byelorussia as well.<sup>61</sup>

The Hramada was the center of Byelorussian nationalism. It drew upon small circles of ethnic Byelorussian students and intellectuals and lacked influence outside those circles. But involvement in the Hramada trained numbers of ethnic Byelorussian young people, many of whom were to continue as political activists, in a politics that was ethnically expansive and in which demands for national independence were aligned with social democracy and involved demands for equality and social reform. In a region in which nationalism was becoming associated with the right, and with demands for the political and cultural hegemony of one ethnic group or another, the progressive character of Byelorussian nationalism was highly unusual. Byelorussian nationalism was also unusual in its weakness. Elsewhere in the region in the early decades of the twentieth century, nationalist movements drew large constituencies and exercised considerable influence. Byelorussia's unusual demography precluded such developments. Throughout the region, political movements, nationalist or otherwise, were based mostly in urban populations and were spearheaded by urban elites. Opposition to the rule of the Russian czars was widespread in early twentieth-century Byelorussia, and many city dwellers were supportive of a demand for an independent Byelorussian state. But the domination of Byelorussia's cities, and to an even

greater extent, of its urban elite, by Jews and others who were not ethnic Byelorussians left little basis for nationalist influence, and little room for the variety of nationalism taking hold elsewhere in the region, which promoted the hegemony of one ethnic group while disregarding the interests of others.

#### NATIONALISM, ANTI-SEMITISM, AND SOVIET COMMUNISM

By the time of the Russian Civil War, nationalism had largely replaced Christianity as the driving force behind anti-Semitism. Christian stereotypes remained embedded in eastern European ethnic cultures, including Byelorussian culture. For centuries, in eastern Europe, Christianity had justified political power, and social relations of all kinds had been shaped by the vocabulary of religion. The rise of nationalist movements and of socialism and Communism introduced a new set of conflicts and a new vocabulary. Accusations of ritual murder of Christians were still likely to be believed and could lead to attacks on Jews. But in Poland, where anti-Semitism rose sharply in the 1920s and 1930s, the accusations that had force were those of right-wing nationalists, who charged Jews with obstructing or betraying the interests of the Polish nation, to which, they believed, Jews could not fully belong.

In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, opposition to the Soviet Union, and to Communism, became a major focus of right-wing nationalism in Poland and elsewhere in eastern Europe. Outside the Soviet Union, in Poland and elsewhere, only tiny percentages of Jews belonged to Communist parties or supported a Soviet form of socialism. Nevertheless, Communist parties, themselves very small, tended to have large numbers of Jewish members, partly because the parties strongly opposed anti-Semitism at a time when few others could be counted upon to take such a stand. The large numbers of Jews in many eastern European Communist parties and in the leadership of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet government made it possible for right-wing nationalists to link Jews with Communism and attack both in the same breath. The connection between Jews and Communism was strengthened further in the late 1930s as the prospect of rule by either Germany or the Soviet Union loomed over Poland. Given this choice, the vast majority of Polish Jews ardently hoped for Soviet rule. Many Jews in eastern Poland openly welcomed the arrival of Red Army troops; many more no doubt privately drew breaths of relief.<sup>62</sup> Russia had been Poland's traditional enemy; in the eyes of many Poles the Soviet Union was the same or worse. From

this perspective, Jewish support for Soviet rule amounted to betrayal of the Polish nation.

In Byelorussia, Soviet rule led to a decline in anti-Semitism, but the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and Lithuania during the twenty months preceding the German attack on the Soviet Union had the opposite effect. Byelorussia had joined the Soviet Union more or less voluntarily, and although the Byelorussian government followed directives from Moscow, many regarded Communism as authentically Byelorussian. In eastern Poland and Lithuania, the Soviets were an occupying force. They were more concerned with solidifying their own rule, and eliminating opposition, or potential opposition, than with cultivating local support. They declared political organizations that they regarded as potential sources of opposition illegal and arrested many of the leaders of these organizations. They placed those whom they felt they could count on to support Soviet policies and Soviet rule in administrative positions; some were Jews. Local hatred of Soviet rule, and of those who helped to carry it out, escalated in the last months before the German attack. In four waves of deportations, beginning in February 1940, the Soviets forced the relocation of about half a million people from eastern Poland and Lithuania to Siberia or the Soviet east. The Soviet occupation involved repression of Jews as well as of others: many Zionists were arrested, and Jews were disproportionately represented among those deported to the east. But Jews were sharply aware that German rule would be much worse. Most ethnic Poles and Lithuanians hated the Soviet occupiers without reservation. The participation of some Jews in the Soviet administration, and the ambivalent attitude of most Jews toward Soviet rule, led to a widespread view of Jews as pro-Soviet, and therefore traitors.<sup>63</sup>

In Byelorussia (or, more precisely, eastern Byelorussia) Soviet rule had a very different history. The initiative to join a Russian federation had come from political parties in Byelorussia in the context of the February Revolution. Though the attitudes of these parties toward the October Revolution were more mixed, the establishment of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was nevertheless regarded as having emerged out of an indigenous political process. During the 1920s and early 1930s, Soviet policies had encouraged the participation of national minorities in the building of socialism and had allowed them some degree of local initiative. The Soviet New Economic Policy had encouraged a conciliatory approach to the peasantry. In Byelorussia these two policies made it possible for local people—ethnic Byelorussians, Jews, and others—to participate actively in the construction of a socialist, industrializing, and

modern (or at least somewhat modern) nation. Soviet socialism in Byelorussia had a Byelorussian face.

As elsewhere, Jews joined the Communist Party in disproportionately high numbers in Byelorussia; in 1928, ethnic Byelorussians made up 54.3 percent of party members, Jews 23.7 percent, and ethnic Russians 14 percent.<sup>64</sup> In eastern Poland and Lithuania, as well as elsewhere in eastern Europe, right-wing nationalists used the special connection of Jews to Communism as a basis for anti-Semitism, and they found large audiences receptive to this argument. In Byelorussia, no local people with any great influence made this argument. When the Germans tried this argument during the war, they complained that few Byelorussians responded to it. The reason was that the argument lacked indigenous roots. Before the war there was considerable discontent with Soviet rule, especially in the countryside, but this did not lead to organized opposition. For one thing, there was no golden age in the past to serve as a point of comparison: czarist rule had been no better. Also, collectivization was considerably less harsh in Byelorussia than elsewhere, especially Ukraine, because the repression associated with it there was directed mostly at the kulaks, or well-to-do peasants, and there were few well-to-do peasants in the Byelorussian countryside. Finally, there was no organized political force in prewar Byelorussia promoting resistance to the Soviets or blaming the Jews for Soviet rule.<sup>65</sup>

In the Byelorussian cities attitudes toward Soviet rule in its first decades were largely positive. Many Byelorussian social democrats were at least at first skeptical of Soviet rule, and many nationalists fled the country, mostly to Germany. But in the early 1920s Soviet policy took a turn that created openings for some former skeptics and opponents. The Soviet leadership realized that holding the ethnically extremely diverse Soviet Union together required winning at least some degree of support from its various national minorities, and also that dampening opposition from the countryside to the revolution required backing away from the most repressive approaches to collectivization and making some efforts to include the peasants in local decision-making. Furthermore, the Soviets were prepared to build factories and a university in Minsk and to build schools and conduct a literacy campaign in the countryside. The Soviet campaign against anti-Semitism and other forms of racial and ethnic discrimination opened the way for full participation in society on the part of Jews and also gave an official blessing to interethnic cooperation in building socialism in Byelorussia. In the past, such cooperative efforts had always been in opposition to those in power. Many social democrats

and some nationalists joined in the project of building Byelorussian socialism. In response to a special Soviet invitation, some of the Byelorussian nationalists who had fled to Germany and elsewhere returned to Byelorussia and joined the Byelorussian Soviet administration.<sup>66</sup>

The purges of the late 1930s, intended to rid Communist Party organizations of dissenters and others who resisted Stalin's central control, were as devastating in Byelorussia as elsewhere; more than half of the members of the Byelorussian Communist Party were expelled or arrested during the years 1934–36.<sup>67</sup> But by this time many urban Byelorussians had come to regard Soviet rule as legitimate, and to think of Byelorussian and Russian interests as intertwined, and there was little expression of outrage. Some Byelorussians opposed Soviet rule before the war, and during the war aligned themselves with the Germans and castigated Jews for having supported the Soviets. But the Germans were unable to mobilize popular support for this attitude in Minsk or elsewhere in Byelorussia.

At the time of the war and in the years preceding it, Raissa Khasenyevich (born Riva Sherman) regarded herself as an ardent Soviet internationalist, a Byelorussian patriot, and also a Jew. Though at that time she took her Jewish identity largely for granted, she did not regard it as in conflict with either Soviet internationalism or Byelorussian patriotism. When Raissa was a teenager, in the early 1930s, she studied in Moscow for a year. She returned to Minsk, she said, because she was very patriotic. That is, she was not just a Soviet, but also a Byelorussian, patriot. She had grown up in a shtetl in Ukraine but had painful memories of anti-Semitism there; later, after moving to Minsk for work, she had arranged for her parents and one of her sisters to follow her there. At that time and through the war, she supported Stalin and the Communist Party without ambivalence. After the war, in the face of escalating Soviet anti-Semitism, she became more critical of the Soviet authorities, and when she encountered anti-Semitism, she spoke out against it.<sup>68</sup> She remained nevertheless an ardent internationalist and supporter of the Communist vision until the end of her life. There were many Soviet Jews of her generation who, like her, regarded themselves as internationalists and Soviet patriots. But it was easier to be a Jew and a local patriot, without a sense of contradiction between the two identities, in Byelorussia than elsewhere in the region. In Ukraine such a couplet would have been haunted by the bloody history of anti-Semitism.

In Byelorussia as well, even in the decades before the war, there were many Byelorussian Jews who did not share Khasenyevich's enthusiasm

for Soviet rule. The Yiddish novel *Zelmanyane* by Soviet Jewish writer Moishe Kulbak describes the destruction of an extended family of Minsk Jews living in a common courtyard in the years after the revolution. Several of the young people are ardent supporters of the revolution, but members of the older generation resent being forced out of traditional occupations into factory work. Ultimately the Soviet authorities decide that they want the courtyard in which the family has lived for generations as the site for a plant. The family's expulsion is accomplished through the collusion of one of the young people, a member of the Communist Party who regards her family's way of life as outmoded and not worth preserving.<sup>69</sup> Kulbak's novel captured a side of Soviet rule that became more apparent to many Byelorussian Jews in the years after the war. But Raissa Khasenyevich and others who shared her views would not have recognized themselves in Kulbak's story even after the war, when Stalin's crimes and his anti-Semitism were revealed. They would have insisted that to them Communism meant a vision of an egalitarian society in which anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination would no longer exist.

The conception of Byelorussian identity that in the prewar years allowed young people in Minsk to think of themselves more as Byelorussians and Soviet citizens than as members of particular ethnic groups provided an indigenous basis for an ethnically inclusive understanding of patriotism. For Byelorussian Communists and others in and close to the Byelorussian Communist Party, patriotism meant defending Byelorussian territory and all the peoples who lived in it from foreign occupation. This was of course the conception of patriotism that the Soviets had stressed before the war, not just in Byelorussia but throughout the Soviet Union. During the war, while the Soviet leadership was backing away from the campaign against anti-Semitism that had been a centerpiece of prewar internationalism, this stance continued to make sense to rank-and-file Communists in occupied Byelorussia and to many others outside the Communist Party as well. Alexei Vasilievich Chernenko, a non-Jew who organized an autonomous underground group in Minsk that helped Jews escape the ghetto, pointedly referred to Jews as "Soviet citizens" and clearly regarded helping them as his patriotic duty.<sup>70</sup>

Jews in the Minsk underground and on its periphery, and many Byelorussians in those categories as well, likewise regarded anti-Semitism as treason (at least when it expressed hatred of Jews rather than a habit of speech: the cultural reflex that led underground member Saychik to refer to Gebelev as "that Jew" did not lead anyone to think that he was



a German agent). Dina Beinenson, a member of the Minsk ghetto underground, was at one point assigned to meet a man named Rat'kov, a member of the Byelorussian underground, at the ghetto fence. Rat'kov did not appear at the appointed time. The liaison that had arranged the contact between Beinenson and Rat'kov later told Beinenson that Rat'kov had said, "The hell with that Jew, I don't want to meet with her." "So we understood," Beinenson wrote later, "that Rat'kov was a traitor." And so he turned out to be; he later informed on the liaison, a Komsomol member.<sup>71</sup> Soon after the liberation, Raissa Khasenyevich, recently returned from her partisan unit, spotted Volsky, her former colleague, on a Minsk street; during the war he had identified her as a Jew (and also, incorrectly, as a Communist) to the Germans, which had led to her arrest and imprisonment. She seized him, called out to a nearby policeman that she had caught a traitor, and Volsky was arrested. A similar scene probably could have taken place in Ukraine, and conceivably in postwar Communist Poland as well. But Raissa's confidence that all patriots would agree that an anti-Semite was a traitor had a particularly Byelorussian flavor.

## The Minsk Ghetto

### THE GERMAN ATTACK ON MINSK

On the morning of June 22, 1941, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. Later that day an emergency meeting of leaders of the Byelorussian Communist Party was held in Minsk; it was decided to evacuate children from Minsk and to form armed detachments, and place them throughout the city in order to provide security and keep order. But it was too late, at least for providing security. On June 23 and 24, German planes bombed Minsk, destroying many buildings in the center of the city and causing fires. Because the summer had already begun, many of Minsk's children were in camps outside the city; children in some of these camps were put on buses or trains and evacuated, though apparently without their parents being notified. Many of those who worked at what were deemed the most important plants were summoned to work and not allowed to go home. On the night of June 24–25 the leaders of the Byelorussian Communist Party and high government officials packed what belongings they could into their cars and drove toward Moscow. By June 27–28, when German soldiers arrived in Minsk, the Communist leadership was gone. No organized evacuation of Minsk took place. No one was left in the city with the assignment of organizing resistance.<sup>1</sup>

In the first days of the German attack, even before the German soldiers arrived, a large part of the center of Minsk was destroyed. Many houses burned to the ground, leaving only chimneys and at their bases

the large Russian stoves that were used for heating as well as cooking. Rows of brick buildings, apartment buildings, shops, and offices were hollowed out, nothing remaining except brick walls. Fires spread from houses and buildings that were bombed to nearby wooden houses. In the chaos of burning Minsk, everyone fled who could. Some hid in bomb shelters on the edges of the city; many fled to nearby villages, where in the following days they were likely to encounter German soldiers who drove them back to Minsk.

For a few days after the German attack on the Soviet Union, before the Germans reached the east and began turning refugees back, it was possible to flee what was soon to be occupied territory. Thousands took this opportunity and streamed out of Minsk toward the east, mostly on foot. Few Minsk residents except for high Communist Party officials had cars, but some were able to get hold of vehicles used at their workplaces or had horses and wagons, or at least bicycles. Crowds of people streamed eastward along either the northern road out of Minsk, toward Moscow, or the eastern route, toward Mogilev. Many in these crowds were Jews, Communists, or people with close ties to the Communist Party, all people who had reason to believe that they were likely to be special targets of the Germans. But many, including Jews and Communists who would become the main targets of the Germans, remained in Minsk past the time when it was possible to leave, because members of their families were at their workplaces and could not leave, or because children were in kindergartens or camps that could not be reached because of the fires, or out of concern for elderly members of the family or infants, who might not survive the journey.

As crowds of people made their way toward the east, German planes flew overhead, dropping bombs; many people were killed, and some decided to turn back. Some, in particular those who had chosen the eastern route toward Mogilev, preceded the Germans, escaped what would soon be German-occupied territory, and continued eastward. But many others found German soldiers barring their way. The road toward Mogilev remained open for a longer period, allowing more people who had taken that route to get through; those who had taken the road toward Moscow were more likely to be turned back. Those who were forced back returned to find Minsk in chaos. So many houses were gone, especially in the center of the city, that many people had difficulty recognizing their neighborhoods and finding their streets. Members of families were searching for each other, leaving notes in bombed-out houses. Many shops were closed, and looting was widespread. Many

streets were scattered with rubble from destroyed houses, thus impossible to walk on, and much of the city was covered with a fine, gritty dust made up of ground brick and mortar. Some people found their homes intact; others camped out in hollowed-out structures, moved in with friends or relatives, or lived on the street.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the vacuum of leadership in Minsk was quickly filled by the Germans, who took over the City Council (or *Uprava*), its offices, and the police stations and set up the administrative structures that would govern not only Minsk, but, in addition, all of Reichskommissariat Ostland, the German-created administrative unit that included the Baltics as well as Byelorussia.

While thousands of Minsk residents were trying to flee the country, there were other Byelorussians, especially those in the countryside, whose initial attitude toward the invading Germans was more guarded than hostile. There were many peasants, especially, who were not sorry to see the Soviets go; the Communist Party had considerably less influence in the countryside than it did in the cities. In the cities as well there were those who had disliked Soviet rule. But such discontent remained relatively passive. Soviet rule had not been forced on Byelorussia, but had been more or less chosen; a show of force on the part of the Red Army had played a role in the last stage of the process, but only after a conference of Byelorussian political parties had proclaimed their support for Byelorussia's entry into a socialist, Russian federation. These parties were based in the Byelorussian cities, especially in Minsk. There was considerably less enthusiasm in the countryside for Byelorussia's entry into the Soviet Union. But there was little sentiment even in the countryside for open, organized antagonism to Soviet rule. There was nothing better, in the immediate past, to compare it with; the Soviets replaced the rule of the czars. Furthermore, the Byelorussian peasantry was not given to political activity. The Soviets were in some respects culturally familiar; because Byelorussia had been part of the Russian empire, Russian was widely spoken in Byelorussia and few made sharp distinctions between Byelorussian and Russian cultures. The Germans were in Byelorussian eyes considerably more foreign culturally than the Russians. Nevertheless, many Byelorussians, especially those in the countryside, were at first open to the possibility that the Germans might turn out to be better rulers than the Soviets. In Minsk, the bombing of the city, the greater influence of the Communist Party, and the extent of Soviet culture led to a more suspicious attitude toward the Germans. But even in Minsk some people welcomed the German troops, and many men,

especially those who were very poor, volunteered to serve as police under the Germans.

Some Jews at first shared the wait-and-see attitude held by the majority of Byelorussians. For the year and nine months preceding the German invasion, due to the Soviet pact with Germany, negative information about the Nazi regime had been screened out of the news that reached Soviet populations. Some bits of information about German treatment of Jews elsewhere had nevertheless gotten through. When the Germans took over western Poland, many Jews had fled to the east. Others had fled eastward in the wake of the German attack on Soviet-occupied eastern Poland, thinking that the Germans would stop at the border of the traditional Soviet Union, not expecting that the Germans would soon overrun Byelorussia and Ukraine. These Jews brought with them accounts of German treatment of Jews in the areas that they had fled. Furthermore, prior to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact a film about Germany that included scenes of German brutality toward Jews had been shown in the Soviet Union (afterwards, while the Soviet Union was allied with Germany, the authorities did their best to prevent negative information about Germany from reaching the Soviet public). Some Minsk Jews recalled having seen this film.<sup>3</sup>

Rumors of German hostility toward Jews conflicted, however, with the long-standing view, among Jews, of German culture as particularly enlightened in regard to Jews, and also with the impressions of many older Byelorussian Jews, who remembered the brief German invasion at the time of the Civil War, and the decency with which German soldiers had treated Jews. In any event, since no one had expected a German attack on the Soviet Union, and since the Soviet Union had become to a large degree insulated, and the connections even of Jews to the outside world had become very attenuated, the question of how the Nazi regime was treating Jews had not been a major topic of conversation among Minsk Jews. When the Germans invaded, everyone understood that they would treat Communists as enemies, and there were many Jewish Communists. But many people, including many Jews, did not understand that Jews would be special targets, or at least were unsure that this would be the case. No one anticipated anything like the level of violence that was to take place.

The first sign of the Germans' attitude toward Jews came several weeks into the occupation. In early July German authorities ordered all male residents of Minsk between the ages of fifteen and forty-five to report to public squares in order to be registered. Some, especially Communists, disobeyed this order and hid, but most complied. Tens of thousands of

men were marched out of the city to an area outside the village of Drozdy, three kilometers north of Minsk, where the Germans had established a primitive camp by roping off a field on the bank of the Svisloch River. When the men from Minsk arrived, a prisoner-of-war camp was already in place, located adjacent to the area where the civilians were placed, and separated from it by ropes. Soon after their arrival the Germans divided the Jews and non-Jews among the civilians and placed them in separate areas. The men were ordered to sit or lie on the ground, and they were not given food or water. German officers with guns stood on the edges of the camp; at night watchtowers beamed lights across the crowd to detect efforts at escape.

The Byelorussian civilians were soon released, leaving the Jews and the prisoners of war in adjacent areas. During the days they baked in the hot summer sun, and on several nights they were pelted with rain. Some men managed to get water from the river, but others who tried to approach it were ordered away by German guards. Many men died of heat and thirst. After several days those among the Jews who had higher degrees, who worked with their heads rather than their hands, were ordered to separate themselves from the crowd and step forward. Some, suspecting a trick (in Soviet vocabulary, a provocation), decided not to step forward. But thousands obeyed the order, perhaps thinking that the Germans saw them as more useful than others, and that they would get better treatment. Doctors and other medical professionals, and engineers, were ordered to rejoin the crowd behind the ropes. The others were put on trucks, taken to a field nearby, and shot. It is estimated that 3,000 were murdered.<sup>4</sup> This was the first German massacre in Minsk.

Several days after the men were taken to Drozdy, news reached Minsk of where they had been taken, and Jewish women began to converge on the camp with baskets of food and bottles of water for relatives and friends. The Germans, perhaps at a loss about what to do with all the men under their control, let the women through the ropes and into the camp. Some women wore several layers of clothes into the camp. Some men disguised as women left the camp surrounded by groups of women, and thus protected from close inspection by the Germans. Some women, especially Communists and Komsomol members, rescued many men in this way, prisoners of war as well as civilians, among them men who later helped to form underground groups in the ghetto and in the city.

More than a week after the men were first taken to Drozdy, the Germans dismantled the Jewish camp that they had established there. Many men were released, but others were marched to the Minsk prison, where

the Germans tried to identify members of the Communist Party who had not been among the professionals and intellectuals already massacred. The Germans had a list of members of the Byelorussian Communist Party, and in the prison they called out names from this list. Those who responded to their names were executed. Some Communists had the presence of mind not to respond when their names were called.<sup>5</sup> But many Jewish Communists were executed. Those who remained were released into the Minsk ghetto, which the Germans had in the meantime established.<sup>6</sup>

The massacre at Drozdy had an impact on the underground movement that was soon to emerge in the ghetto: since so many of Minsk's Jewish male professionals and intellectuals were murdered at the outset of the war, the Jewish resistance movement was very largely made up of working-class people whose education did not go beyond high school; many had attended trade schools rather than academically oriented high schools. The movement also included a high proportion of women. The relatively few intellectuals in the underground organization included several women, a number of refugees from the west who arrived in Minsk after the internment in Drozdy, some local men who had managed to avoid going to Drozdy, and doctors and engineers, whom the Germans exempted from the massacre of male intellectuals. The Germans knew that very large numbers of doctors and engineers in Soviet Byelorussia were Jews, and they knew that they could not do without people with these skills. Despite the massacre of Minsk's male Jewish intellectuals, the literacy and educational level of the Jewish population remained much higher than that of the ethnic Byelorussian population. There were many skills that Jews were much more likely to possess than Byelorussians; electricians, radio repairmen, printers, and typesetters, for instance, were very likely to be Jews. The Minsk ghetto remained, in large part, because the Germans needed skilled, educated workers, especially in the city that they had designated as the administrative center for the region. The Minsk ghetto existed longer than any other major ghetto in the occupied Soviet territories, Byelorussia and Ukraine. In many places the Germans massacred Jews without establishing a ghetto first; in other places ghettos were established and destroyed, along with their inhabitants, within months.

#### THE CREATION OF THE MINSK GHETTO

On July 20, a few days after much of the adult male population of Minsk was imprisoned in the Drozdy camp, the Germans posted notices

around Minsk in German and in Byelorussian announcing that all Minsk Jews were to move into the old Jewish neighborhood in the northwest part of the city. The boundaries of what was to be the Jewish ghetto were described on the poster, along with a warning that any Jew found outside its limits would be shot. Shortly before this poster appeared, the Germans had created a Judenrat, or Jewish Council, appointing as its head Ilya (or Elye) Mushkin, an engineer, and a member of the Communist Party, who had worked with the City Council before the war. The poster gave Jews a week to move into the ghetto; in response to Mushkin's pleas, the date was extended a few days, to August 1. By the time of the war many Byelorussians as well as Jews lived in this area; they were given ten days to move out. The Judenrat, to which the Germans assigned a large, two-story building on Jubilee Square, at the center of the ghetto, supervised the move. Jews moving into the ghetto registered at tables in front of the Judenrat building; they were given identification passes, later used for leaving the ghetto for work, and those who had no place to live were assigned living quarters. Many, in the weeks following the order establishing the ghetto, had either exchanged apartments with non-Jews in the area that was to become a ghetto, who were now required to move out, or had arranged to move in with relatives or friends in the area. The registration process was chaotic, and some Jews, especially Communists, who wanted to escape the notice of the Germans took the opportunity to obtain identification under assumed names.<sup>7</sup>

The ghetto was established in Minsk's traditional Jewish neighborhood, on the northwest edge of the city. The Svisloch bisected the city, running northwest to southeast; the city center lay on both sides of the river. On the west side of the river, Nemiga Street was lined with stores. Just south of Nemiga was Svobody Square, the location of the Minsk City Hall (Uprava). The Byelorussian government buildings were located a few blocks farther south, on Sovietskaya Street. Bridges connected the main streets on the east and west sides of the river. The old Jewish neighborhood, which the Germans designated as the ghetto, lay to the north of Nemiga. Minsk had at one time consisted of a collection of rural villages made up of one-story log cabins, and at the time of the war much of the city still consisted of such houses. The appearance of the old Jewish neighborhood was quite different from that of the area south of Nemiga, where there were many several-story brick buildings, and also from Sovietskaya Street, which was lined with many structures built in the Soviet style, made of concrete and massive (see fig. 3).





Figure 3. An alley in the ghetto, after the war. Photography courtesy of David Taubkin.

The old Jewish neighborhood west of the Svisloch consisted largely of small, one- or two-story wooden houses grouped around courtyards connected by small alleys; there were also some houses made of stone. The posters announcing the establishment of a ghetto had said that a brick fence would be placed around it, but in fact Jews were forced to construct a barbed-wire fence around the area. The boundaries of the ghetto ran from the Svisloch west, on Nemiga Street, north along the edge of the Jewish cemetery, and then eastward, back toward the Svisloch. The main street in the neighborhood was Respublikanskaya, which ran from Nemiga north and uphill to Jubilee Square, at the center of the neighborhood. Both the Judenrat building and the Labor Exchange, where Jews were organized into work brigades to be sent out of the ghetto, were located in Jubilee Square. The Judenrat building was at the corner of Tankovaya and Ratomskaya, and the Labor Exchange, on the other side of the square, at the corner of Opanskovo and Sukhaya. The other major institution in the ghetto, the Jewish Hospital, was located near Jubilee Square, at Sukhaya and Opanskovo. The ghetto's main gate was at the foot of Respublikanskaya, where it met Nemiga, and the secondary gate, at the foot of Opanskovo. The main gate was situated at the foot of Respublikanskaya, on the southern edge of the

ghetto, where Respublikanskaya met Nemiga. The secondary gate was at the northern edge of the ghetto, at the foot of Opanskovo. The two streets met in Jubilee Square, Respublikanskaya entering it from the south, Opanskovo from the north.

Groups of Jews assembled every morning in Jubilee Square and were led down Respublikanskaya and out the main gate to work in the city (or during pogroms to their deaths). Those being taken to chop wood in the forest were led down Opanskovo, and out the northern side of the ghetto. During the fall of 1941 the Germans divided the ghetto by placing barbed-wire fences on both sides of Respublikanskaya Street. These internal barbed-wire fences had gates that were locked at night, preventing movement from one part of the ghetto to the other. In November 1941 the Germans began bringing thousands of Jews from Germany and elsewhere in central Europe to Minsk. The Germans created a ghetto within a ghetto by fencing off a block just west of Respublikanskaya. This ghetto within a ghetto, which the Germans called the “Sonderghetto,” or special ghetto, was intended to prevent contact between the German Jews and the Byelorussian Jews, and to a large extent it accomplished this. The Tatar Gardens, an area with quiet streets and many vegetable gardens, lay to the northwest, between the ghetto and the river. The busiest and most densely populated areas of Minsk were those to the southeast of the ghetto, where a railroad station, and the Minsk City Hall and the Byelorussian government buildings, were located, and across the Svisloch, where more shops and public buildings were located (see fig. 4)

Map 1 shows the boundaries of the ghetto when it was established. Between November 1941 and March 1942 the Germans conducted successive massacres in the ghetto, which the Jews called pogroms; after each of these the territory of the ghetto was reduced. By the end of March 1942 the ghetto had been reduced to a third of its original size. Most of the reduction took place in the southwestern area of the ghetto. The section of the ghetto that lay between the Tatar Gardens and Respublikanskaya Street became smaller and smaller as the barbed-wire fence was moved farther and farther from the river. Ghetto Jews joked bitterly that the Germans were pushing them closer and closer to the cemetery.

The area designated as the ghetto had remained largely undamaged in the first days of the war; the Germans had targeted the center of the city, not the village-like outlying districts. But the approximately twenty small blocks of the ghetto were not equipped to absorb anything like the numbers of people who now squeezed within its borders. The result was



Figure 4. The ghetto. Photograph courtesy of the Belarussian State Museum of Film, Phono, and Photo Documents.

almost intolerable crowding, with some apartments containing thirty or more people. During the late summer and early fall months, the Germans repeatedly conducted raids in the ghetto, shooting some people on sight and rounding up others. The ghetto population knew that those who had been driven out of the ghetto had been taken to their deaths. During the day, everyone who could stay in their house did so, despite the heat and stench. At night, room had to be found for everyone to sleep. In some houses bunk beds were constructed. Where there were not enough beds, people slept in rows on the floor, if necessary with their feet propped on the stomachs of their neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

In order to control entry and exit from the ghetto, the Germans required the ghetto police force, the Jewish Police, which was under the aegis of the Judenrat, to guard the ghetto gate from the inside; German soldiers and Byelorussian police patrolled the outside. Russian Jews were required to attach two round yellow patches to their outerwear, such as coats or jackets, one on the breast and one on the back, identifying them as Jews. The German Jews wore yellow patches in the shape of a Star of David, like those worn by Jews in ghettos outside the Soviet Union, rather than the round yellow patches worn by the Byelorussian Jews. Byelorussian and German Jews were forbidden to leave the ghetto without their patches visible. Later, when the Germans became aware that there was an underground organization in the ghetto, and began trying to track it to particular locations, they added the requirement that every Jew wear a rectangular white patch with the street and number of his or



Figure 5. The ghetto fence. Photograph courtesy of the Belarussian State Museum of the Great Patriotic War.

her residence in black lettering. Leaving the ghetto, other than in a column of those being led to work, was punishable by death, but many nevertheless risked it. During the first weeks it was not difficult to leave the ghetto, because the fence was not yet completed (see fig. 5). The Jewish cemetery remained unfenced for months. Some Jews went in and out through the cemetery, though others avoided it, because police and soldiers patrolled this part of the ghetto's border especially assiduously; while it was easy to leave this way, it was also especially dangerous. Many Jews went in and out of the ghetto against German orders, but few remained outside it, especially in the first months, because it was not clear where they could go. Minsk was a small city. According to the Soviet census of 1939, its population on the eve of the war was nearly 239,000.<sup>9</sup> In a city of this size, people knew each other, and Byelorussian police were likely to recognize Jews who left the ghetto. Hiding in the city for any extended period was very difficult, especially since Minsk was the German administrative center for the region and was overrun with German military personnel.

Jews left the ghetto regularly, because there was very little food there, and they would have starved without food from outside. It was German policy to distribute food rations to both working and nonworking Jews. Descriptions of what was included in these rations vary. Zelig Yafo, the son of Moishe Yoffe, Mushkin's assistant, recalls that the Germans gave Jews 200 grams of bread a day or 200 grams of flour.<sup>10</sup> This was the ration for those who worked for the Germans; those who did not work,

due to age, infirmity, or the need to care for small children, were to receive half of what was allotted for working Jews.<sup>11</sup> In fact, most Jews who worked outside the ghetto received food, of varying quantity and quality, at their workplaces. The rations that the Germans allocated for non-working Jews in the ghetto, which were distributed by the Judenrat, were not enough to keep anyone alive. In any event they were not always available.

Many children and teenagers, and some adults, regularly left the ghetto to find food. Most pulled the wire up and crawled under it; some cut holes in the wire, did their best to disguise the severed wires, and used these exits repeatedly. Some left, and reentered, the ghetto with working columns, slipping away from the columns when they entered the city. Those who begged for food in the city were rarely turned down, but many Jews who left the ghetto were captured and shot. It was also possible to exchange clothes and other items at the fence with Byelorussians, who brought food for barter. Conditions outside the ghetto in wartime Minsk were not anywhere near as dire as they were inside the ghetto, but many were in need of basic necessities, because the Germans were extracting everything they could for their own use, and for the support of their army. In the countryside, peasants could feed themselves on their own produce (as long as it was not requisitioned by either partisans or German soldiers); in Minsk there was a severe shortage of food, as well as everything else. Many Minsk residents dealt with this situation by engaging in a three-way trade that involved taking food to the ghetto fence; trading it for clothes, watches, or other items; and then taking these to the countryside, where they could be traded for more food. Luxury items, such as jewelry and alcohol, could be used for trade with Germans or for bribes. Despite this trade there was widespread hunger during the war; the lives of many Byelorussians in Minsk revolved around making sure that they and their families had enough to eat. Flour soup (flour added to boiling water) was a common dish.<sup>12</sup>

Like leaving the ghetto, the trade at the fence was forbidden; Byelorussians or Jews caught trading could be arrested, and for Jews it could result in death. Jews engaged in this trade despite the danger, sometimes paying off a Byelorussian policeman to pretend that he did not see the exchange.<sup>13</sup> Without these sources of food, many in the ghetto would have died of starvation, and in fact many did starve to death or succumbed to diseases that they might have survived if they had not been weakened by hunger. Families already living in the area that the Germans turned into a ghetto were likely to have staples, such as flour, potatoes, and cereals,

and many had gardens in which they grew vegetables. Families forced to move into this area had left valuables in the hands of Byelorussians (some of whom turned out to be trustworthy guardians of Jews' property, and some not); food staples were among the things that many brought with them into the ghetto. But food ran out quickly in the ghetto. Jews who worked for the Germans outside the ghetto or in workshops inside the ghetto were given pieces of bread and watery soup at midday. Jews took containers to work, in which they were given the soup; many took it home to their families.

Inside the ghetto, the Judenrat operated a canteen, when it was able to get the resources to do so: bits of bread and plates of watery soup were doled out to those who did not work, and who would have starved without these rations. According to Anna Machis, who wrote a report on the ghetto for the Soviets after she had escaped and was in a partisan unit in the forest, most of the food in the canteen consisted of waste from German kitchens; potato peels were a staple.<sup>14</sup> Within months of the establishment of the ghetto, the staples that many families had brought with them had become luxuries, and potato peels, nettles, and grass had become everyday fare. Exchanging clothes for food at the gate or leaving the ghetto without German permission to bring food back in had become a necessity, worth the danger of being caught bringing food into the ghetto and being beaten or shot. Children were often best at crawling under the fence, begging or stealing food, and returning to the ghetto unnoticed. They also had the time to do it, because the younger children at least did not work outside the ghetto. Despite the dangers involved, their parents allowed them to do this. During the day, children ran in packs through the ghetto; partisans were later to discover that it was the children who knew the streets and alleys of the ghetto, and the ways to escape it, best.

During the late summer and early fall of 1941 the ghetto population suffered from the heat, because so many people were packed together in houses and apartments meant for single families, and because recurrent German roundups, and shootings led the Jews to stay inside as much as possible. By the late fall the population had been reduced by pogroms, and cold had become a major problem. The winter of 1941-42 was extraordinarily cold, even by the standards of the region. The Russian winter was in one sense a boon: it weakened and demoralized the German army. But for those in the ghetto the cold was difficult to survive. Wood and other heating materials quickly ran out. People began tearing down fences, and even tearing boards from their houses, to have something to

burn. Some had entered the ghetto with light summer clothes. Many went around wrapped in whatever rags they could find. When Ya'akov Grinstein was brought to the Minsk ghetto in March 1942, following the massacre of most of the Jews in his town, he was taken aback by the dilapidated appearance of the houses in the ghetto, with broken windows and missing boards, and also by the ragged and hungry look of the ghetto population, many of whose bodies were by this time swollen with hunger.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Soviet census of 1939, there were at that time nearly 71,000 Jews in Minsk, a little less than 30 percent of the total population.<sup>16</sup> Anna Machis reported that there were about 75,000 Jews in Minsk when the war began, and this figure may have been accurate, because Minsk's Jewish population had increased since 1939 through the addition of thousands of refugees from German-occupied areas to the west.<sup>17</sup> But many, perhaps as many as several thousand, fled Minsk during the first days of the war and remained in the east for the war's duration. In the weeks and months after the ghetto was established, the Germans brought thousands more Jews to the ghetto from towns outside Minsk where they had massacred the Jewish population but had exempted those who possessed particular skills. The Germans brought these skilled Jews, and their families, to the Minsk ghetto. Others who escaped these massacres fled to Minsk and found their way into the ghetto, because it was safer to be inside than outside it. In November 1941 the Germans began bringing Jews from Germany and elsewhere in central Europe to the Minsk ghetto, increasing its population by at least 5,000 more. In the more extensive of his two accounts of the Minsk ghetto, Hersh Smolar, a surviving leader of the ghetto underground, wrote that in the second month of the ghetto, before the major pogroms began, and also before the arrival of the "Hamburg Jews," as the central European Jews were known in the ghetto, the ghetto population was estimated at more than 100,000.<sup>18</sup>

Both Yiddish and Russian were spoken in the ghetto, and most Jews understood both, at least to a certain degree. Adults and young children were most likely to speak Yiddish, though most adults also understood Russian and were able to speak it to some extent. Young people who had been through the Minsk school system under the Soviets knew Russian, though many of them spoke it with heavy Yiddish accents; they might speak Russian among themselves, and Yiddish when speaking to their elders or to small children who had not yet learned Russian. Some of the Jews from outside Minsk knew Byelorussian, having grown up in towns



and villages where it was spoken. The Polish Jews knew Yiddish as well as Polish, and in many cases also Russian. There were Jews in the ghetto who had grown up in highly assimilated families, and who were accustomed to speaking Russian; most learned Yiddish in the ghetto, if they had not known it previously.

#### THE JUDENRAT, THE JEWISH HOSPITAL, AND THE UNDERGROUND

Public life in the Minsk ghetto was extremely limited. In many of the large ghettos in Poland and Lithuania there were libraries and schools; cultural events were occasionally held, and in some, at least for a time, mainstream Zionist and other Jewish organizations functioned more or less openly. No such activities took place in the Minsk ghetto. With most of the intellectuals gone, no one was likely to organize cultural events. The Minsk ghetto contained no counterparts of the Jewish organizations that in ghettos to the west continued the activities of the intellectuals; there had been no Jewish organizations in prewar Minsk. Furthermore, the Germans were more openly repressive from the beginning in the Minsk ghetto than in the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania. Jews were forbidden to gather on the streets in groups of more than four. If four Jews were to meet on the street, and a fifth were to join them, the fifth might be shot on the spot.<sup>19</sup> Most adults and teenagers, with the exception of women caring for small children, and the old, the disabled, and the ill, left the ghetto for work early in the morning and returned at 5:00 or 6:00 PM. Jews were required to be at home after 7:00 PM; any Jew caught on the streets after that hour could be shot. Children ran through the ghetto during the day, but few adults wished to attract attention by lingering on the streets. For most Jews, social contact was limited to one's household and one's close neighbors, and, for those who worked outside the ghetto, fellow workers, who sometimes included German Jews and Byelorussians.

There were, nevertheless, public institutions in the ghetto. First, there was the Judenrat, appointed by the Germans to oversee the functioning of the ghetto and to carry out German orders. The Judenrat also took on the responsibility of providing what social services it could for ghetto residents. With the paltry resources at its disposal, the Judenrat ran a bakery, a soup kitchen, an orphanage, and a home for the aged (see fig. 6). The second most important institution in the ghetto was the Jewish Hospital, which consisted of two buildings, one housing an infectious





Figure 6. The Judenrat building. Photograph courtesy of the Belarussian State Museum of Film, Phono, and Photo Documents.

diseases clinic and the other a general clinic. Although not far from the infectious diseases clinic, the general clinic actually lay outside the boundary of the ghetto. Finally, there was the underground organization, which was not really a public institution: it was clandestine, and it guarded its secret status assiduously. But it had a major impact on life in the ghetto: its existence influenced the behavior of the Germans, and its message affected the actions of thousands of ghetto Jews and probably had an impact on the thoughts of virtually every Jew in the ghetto, except for small children.

The underground was closely connected to both the Judenrat and the Jewish Hospital. These three institutions formed an unofficial network of resistance. The Judenrat and the Jewish Hospital were ostensibly under German control, and to some degree they were forced to follow German orders. The Judenrat organized the labor brigades that left the ghetto every morning to work for the Germans, provided the Germans with information about conditions in the ghetto, and collected contributions of money and valuables from the Jews when the Germans demanded them. The Judenrat also oversaw the ghetto police, which enforced German orders. But members of the original Minsk Judenrat never handed Jews over to the Germans to be killed (later the Germans appointed others to the Judenrat who did collaborate in this way). For the first eight months of the ghetto's existence all the members of the Judenrat were members of the underground and followed its orders. In

March 1942 the Germans arrested and subsequently executed several members of the Judenrat; the Germans then began placing collaborators on the Judenrat and put them in charge of the ghetto police. The staff of the Jewish Hospital in the ghetto also was forced to provide the Germans with information, but, like the Judenrat, it was a center of underground activity. Dr. Leib Kulik, the director of the Jewish Hospital, and many of the hospital staff were either members of the underground or closely connected to it; some had connections with members of the Byelorussian underground in Minsk, and some developed ties to partisan units.

No other Judenrat in German-occupied eastern Europe was as intertwined with an underground movement as that in the Minsk ghetto, especially during the first eight months of its existence. This connection was partly accidental: Ilya (or Elye) Mushkin, whom the Germans appointed as head of the Minsk Judenrat, apparently sought out such a connection. But in another sense the connection between the Judenrat and the underground was not entirely accidental. In Minsk, professionals were almost certain to be members of the Communist Party. Mushkin and other members of the Judenrat had been connected to members of underground groups outside the ghetto before a connection was established between the Judenrat and the ghetto underground. The ghetto underground and the Judenrat did not decide to work together on their own. In the fall of 1941, Isai Kazinietz, the leader of the Minsk-wide underground, ordered the leaders of the recently formed ghetto underground to work with the Judenrat, with which he and his comrades in the Russian district had already established ties. The cooperation between the underground and the Judenrat was a result of their both belonging to a Communist underground that extended beyond the ghetto, and being committed to following its directives.

A more detailed history of the ghetto underground and its relationships with the Judenrat, the Jewish Hospital, the Minsk-wide underground, and the partisan movement in the surrounding forests will be provided in chapter 4. But a description of life in the ghetto requires a brief account of these institutions here. In the first months of the German occupation, both in the ghetto and outside it, in the area that the Jews called “the Russian district” and that Byelorussians called “the city,” small groups of people, mostly Communists and others who shared their perspective and whom they trusted completely, began meeting in small, secret groups to consider what to do. At first, few of these groups used the word “underground” or discussed forming an organization; instead

they met to consider what they, as groups of Communists and like-minded people, could do to help the Red Army defeat the Germans.

In the late summer and fall of 1941 rumors circulated in the Russian district and in the ghetto that there were partisan units forming in the forests around Minsk consisting of Red Army soldiers who had become separated from their units and found themselves trapped in occupied territory. The Germans were searching for Red Army soldiers; new recruits were recognizable by their shaved heads or very short hair, and others could be identified as well, especially if they had failed to find civilian clothes. The Germans put former Red Army soldiers in prisoner-of-war camps, where conditions were so bad that many were dying. The Germans' treatment of prisoners of war motivated those who had not been captured to form groups and go to the forests, where they lived by taxing the local population, and prepared to fight the Germans. Many peasants regarded the partisans as a nuisance, but over time it became clear that the Germans were also a nuisance, and a much worse one. They were equally prone to taking produce and farm animals, and much less interested than the partisans in winning local support. On occasion the partisans killed particular peasants, but the Germans killed peasants almost at random and over time took to destroying entire villages on the suspicion that they might be supporting the partisans.

Over the course of the war, German brutality toward Byelorussian peasants and Byelorussian hatred of the Germans escalated in tandem. Expanding areas of Byelorussian forest and of pushcha—dense, thicket-like areas of gnarled, ancient trees—came under partisan control. By the last year of the war Byelorussia had become the center of Soviet partisan warfare; the forests were thick with partisan units, no longer consisting only of former Red Army soldiers, but of many others as well, and including people of other nationalities along with ethnic Byelorussians. Over time (and with pressure from Moscow) partisan units became more open to accepting volunteers. But in the early months of the occupation, there were only a few partisan units in the forests around Minsk. It was not easy to make contact with them or to persuade them to accept more members, who would increase the number of those who needed to be fed. These tasks were especially difficult for the ghetto underground, due to the dangers involved in leaving the ghetto and the particular reluctance of many partisan units to admit Jews.

During the first months after the formation of the ghetto, especially in September and October 1941, many people interested in resistance were seeking out ties with others. These included members of the secret

groups that had formed in the ghetto and in the Russian district and also individuals who did not belong to secret groups but wanted to find them. Inside the ghetto, several secret groups came together to form a ghetto underground organization, and a leading committee of three was formed. Outside the ghetto a similar process of coalescence among secret groups and the emergence of a leading group was taking place. Underground members inside and outside the ghetto began making contacts with partisan units in the forest and also with each other across the ghetto boundary. In either late November or early December (depending on whose account one follows) a secret meeting was held outside the ghetto, but with a representative of the ghetto underground present, at which a Minsk-wide underground organization was formed, officially called the Second (or Auxiliary) City Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party. The Minsk underground saw its main purpose as that of supporting the partisan movement by sending supplies and volunteers to the forest. Its secondary, but related, purposes were to conduct propaganda and convince others to join in resistance, and to sabotage German efforts inside the city. The ghetto underground was convinced from its inception that the Germans would ultimately annihilate the ghetto. The strategy of sending people to the forest thus held out not only the opportunity of resistance, but also the possibility of saving the lives of large numbers of Jews.

Soon after the City Committee was formed, its chairman, Isai Kazinietz, entered the ghetto, met with the leaders of the ghetto underground, and ordered them to establish contact with the Judenrat, with which up to this time Kazinietz and his comrades in the Russian district had maintained contact. As a result a close relationship was established between the underground leadership and the Judenrat, especially with its head, Ilya Mushkin, and several others who were particularly committed to underground work. Mushkin was an engineer who had worked with the Minsk City Hall before the war, and he was a member of the Communist Party. There are various accounts of how he came to be appointed as head of the Judenrat. According to one of these, the Germans asked officials in the Minsk City Hall for recommendations, and they were given Mushkin's name. According to Zelig Yafo, whose father, Moishe Yoffe, served as Mushkin's assistant and succeeded him as head of the Judenrat, in the early days of the occupation, before the ghetto was established, a German officer gathered a group of Jews on the street, asked who among them spoke German, and threatened to shoot all of them if no one responded. Mushkin admitted to knowing a few words of German.

The German officer, impressed with Mushkin's respectable clothing and dignified manner, appointed him as head of the Judenrat.<sup>20</sup>

If the Germans thought that Mushkin was their kind of person, someone whom they could work with, they were wrong. Mushkin was a Communist, and he was also a decent and courageous man, willing to take great personal risks to do what he could to protect the ghetto population.<sup>21</sup> What the Germans apparently did not understand was that in Minsk, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, professional status and the dignified manner that often accompanied it were not indications of political conservatism, or of sympathy for Nazi authoritarianism; in fact, those who struck the Germans as having the bearing of members of something of an elite were likely to be members of the Communist Party. Some Soviet professionals joined the Communist Party mostly because career advancement required it, but there were also those who sincerely believed in the Communist ideals of equality and internationalism and hated fascism. Mushkin was one of the latter. Among others on the original Judenrat who were particularly dedicated to the underground were Zyama Serebriansky, who was in charge of the Jewish Police in the ghetto; Hersh Ruditzer, in charge of the Labor Exchange, which assigned ghetto Jews to particular jobs outside the ghetto; and Boris Dolsky, the head of the Housing Department, which assigned those entering the ghetto to apartments and kept lists, to which the Germans had access, of who lived where. Mikhail Zorov, in charge of assistance to the ghetto population, worked with the underground in running the canteen. The Judenrat also oversaw workshops in the ghetto where Jews produced items for the use of the ghetto and clothing for the German army, and saw to it that some goods were reserved for those going to partisan units. According to different accounts, Ruditzer and/or Zorov was in charge of these workshops.<sup>22</sup>

Members of the Judenrat provided the underground with information that they gathered about German intentions, especially intended violence in the ghetto; this enabled the underground to circulate rumors warning people to leave the ghetto if possible or hide in the "malinas," underground bunkers and other hiding places that were constructed all over the ghetto. The Judenrat was forced by the Germans to collect gold, jewelry, and other valuables from the ghetto population but diverted as much of it as possible to the partisans. The Judenrat helped the underground by assigning its members to jobs in the Russian district, where they could engage in sabotage, and removed the names of those who went to the forest from the housing lists, to protect their families and

other members of their households from German retaliation. Leib Kulik, the director of the Jewish Hospital, helped the underground by hiding its members in the hospital when necessary. Jewish doctors who had previously worked in hospitals elsewhere in Minsk were ordered to leave these jobs, and assigned to work in the ghetto hospital. Minsk hospitals outside the ghetto, as well as the Jewish Hospital in the ghetto, were centers of wartime resistance; many doctors and other medical personnel were members of the Communist Party. Many medical workers were Jews. Jewish medical workers tended to have close working relationships with non-Jews who continued to work in the hospitals outside the ghetto. During the war many maintained these connections. Medical workers in the ghetto collected medicines and passed them to the partisans, often via contacts outside the ghetto. Many medical workers developed connections with the underground. Many established their own connections with partisan units and eventually left the ghetto and joined those units.<sup>23</sup> Inside the ghetto, hospital staff visited sick or wounded underground members at home, when it was too dangerous for them to appear on the streets, and kept their care off the hospital records, when it was necessary to hide it from the Germans. For some time the boiler room of the hospital, where Hersh Smolar lived for a time, served as a kind of information headquarters for the underground leadership; due to the Germans' fear of disease, the hospital was probably the safest place in the ghetto.<sup>24</sup>

Opinions of the Judenrat, among the ghetto population, were mixed. At first members of the Judenrat were widely regarded as collaborators and traitors, but over time word got around that Mushkin, especially, was doing his best to help the ghetto population. Many became aware that there was a connection between the Judenrat and the partisans, and as word spread that there was an underground organization in the ghetto, some began to realize that the Judenrat had some connection to it as well. Sophia Sadovskaya, a ghetto resident who got a job at the Jewish Hospital distributing food, ran into Boris Dolsky one morning on her way to work. She knew Dolsky well; their families had been friends before the war. She knew that Dolsky was the head of the Judenrat's Housing Department, and she was not happy to see him, because she regarded him as a collaborator. She nodded curtly when he greeted her. He stopped her and asked if her father-in-law, who, he pointed out, knew German, would be interested in serving as his assistant. Sadovskaya responded that her father-in-law was not willing to sell himself for lentil soup. Dolsky looked surprised and whispered to her, "I thought you

were smarter than that. Don't you realize that we need our people there?" In later conversations Sadovskaya found out more about Dolsky's work: he was assigning members of the underground to apartments that were kept off the official lists, expunging the names of those who went to the forest from housing lists, and working with doctors at the Jewish Hospital to have death certificates issued for them, to explain their absence from work. Sadovskaya's father-in-law became Dolsky's assistant.

Sadovskaya later joined the underground at the invitation of a nurse whom she knew at the hospital. Her father-in-law died of typhus during an epidemic in the ghetto, and Dolsky was arrested by the Germans and executed. The underground ordered Sadovskaya to apply for Dolsky's position as head of the Housing Department of the Judenrat. By this time Nahum Epstein, a collaborator and enemy of the underground, had been appointed as head of the Labor Exchange and had gained enough power within the Judenrat that he was able to decide whom to hire to take Dolsky's place. Sadovskaya applied for the job, despite her fear of the implications of holding it, and of contact with Epstein. During the interview he gloated over being able to fill a position previously occupied by "a partisan traitor" with "a peaceful woman." Sadovskaya became head of the Housing Department and continued Dolsky's work by removing the names of those who left for the forest from the department's files.<sup>25</sup>

Mushkin was arrested in February 1941. He was ordered to report to the General Commissariat, the German headquarters in Minsk, and he never reappeared. The leaders of the underground surmised that his arrest was not a result of his connection with the underground organization, because no one else was arrested at the same time, but rather the result of an individual action. According to one rumor, Mushkin had been hiding a German soldier in his house who wanted to join the partisans, and the soldier had been captured on his way out of Minsk and had betrayed Mushkin.<sup>26</sup> According to another, Mushkin was arrested for trying to bribe a policeman to release a Jew from the ghetto jail.<sup>27</sup>

After Mushkin's arrest Moishe Yoffe, who had been Mushkin's assistant, became head of the Judenrat. Yoffe was a refugee from Vilna; he had been chosen as Mushkin's assistant because he was fluent in German. Yoffe continued the legacy that Mushkin had established of working with the underground, though after the appointment of collaborators to the Judenrat he was forced to become much more circumspect about his underground connections than Mushkin had been. In March 1942 Serebriansky, Dolsky, and Ruditzer, the Judenrat members who after

Mushkin had been most actively involved in underground work, were arrested and later executed. The Germans appointed several Jews from Poland to the Judenrat whom they could count on to collaborate. Chaim Rosenblatt, from Warsaw, was made head of a "Special Operations Group" that was ostensibly subsumed within the Jewish Police but actually due to Rosenblatt and his colleagues' close connections to the Germans soon came to control it. Nahum Epstein, a Jew from Lodz, also a collaborator, was appointed head of the Labor Exchange. Epstein, due to his connections to the Germans and due to the importance that the Germans placed upon the formation of ghetto labor battalions, was able to give orders to Rosenblatt and the Special Operations Group. The Special Operations Group carried out brutal massacres in the ghetto, often directed at the underground. Epstein, Rosenblatt, and others connected to the Special Operations Group lacked ties to the Minsk Jewish community and apparently also lacked consciences. Their role in the Judenrat gave Polish Jews a bad name in the ghetto. There were Polish Jews who managed to join the ghetto underground, but before being accepted they had to go to great lengths to show that they were not like the Polish Jews on the Judenrat and could be trusted.<sup>28</sup>

Epstein and Rosenblatt's presence on the Judenrat, and their close connections to the Germans, made underground work there extremely dangerous: any misstep was sure to be reported, and Joffe and others associated with the underground were now forced to operate with extreme circumspection. Nevertheless, underground work continued. Epstein's two secretaries, Sarah Levina and Mira Strongina, were both members of the underground. They gathered information about Epstein's plans and told the underground, which was often able to warn those targeted for violence in time to save them. Mira Strongina also served as secretary for Rosenblatt. Sophia Sadovskaya's story of persuading Epstein to appoint her in Dolsky's place as head of the Housing Department, is an example of the way in which the underground continued its work in the Judenrat despite the increased danger.

During the last four days of July 1942 the Germans conducted a major pogrom in the ghetto. At the beginning of the pogrom Jews were herded into Jubilee Square, where trucks were waiting for them. Moishe Yoffe was ordered to mount a platform and tell the assembled Jews that if they would obey the orders of the Germans and get into the trucks, they would survive, but if they refused, they would be shot. Instead, Yoffe shouted to the assembled Jews that they were being taken to their deaths and should run and save themselves. Chaos broke out, and the



Germans began shooting. Yoffe was taken off the podium and shot.<sup>29</sup> Other members of the Judenrat, attempting to hide in the Judenrat building, were also shot. During this pogrom, the Germans entered the Jewish Hospital and shot all the patients and staff they could find; Dr. Kulik was among those murdered. After the July pogrom the Judenrat ceased to exist, and Epstein ran the ghetto as head of the Jewish Police. By this time many members of the underground had left for the forest. Some of those who remained in the ghetto were killed during this pogrom, but others hid and survived. The ghetto underground's attention to secrecy made it more difficult for the Germans to discover its members than members of the Judenrat and the hospital staff, who were forced to function more openly.

#### GERMAN POGROMS IN THE GHETTO

The Germans and their auxiliaries—the Byelorussian police, the Ukrainians, and the Lithuanians—began engaging in violence in the territory of the ghetto even before the ghetto was formally established, and after the establishment of the ghetto, the violence escalated. Several days before the ghetto was established, German soldiers went into the area where it was to be located, entered houses, and murdered those whom they found inside. Hinda Tassman, eleven years old at the time, survived the massacre of her family because her father protected her by falling on her as he died, and thus hiding her. A year and a half later she became a guide to the forest and led many groups out of the ghetto to the partisans.<sup>30</sup> After the ghetto was established, the Germans undertook a series of daytime raids, in which they would enter the ghetto and round up large numbers of Jews, at first mostly young men, but later young women as well, and remove them from the ghetto. Those taken out of the ghetto never returned. The Germans also shot some Jews on the spot. Word circulated that those taken out of the ghetto had been killed. Thousands were killed during these raids; estimates of the total number of victims vary.<sup>31</sup>

The Germans also conducted nighttime raids. A number of Germans would drive into the ghetto, stop in front of a house, apparently chosen at random, force their way into it, and murder everyone they found inside. As a result of these raids, in the early months of the ghetto Jews stayed in their houses as much as possible during the days, despite the heat and the crowding. At night, the sound of a car rattling over the cobble streets of the ghetto caused terror, because it could only mean that

another raid was about to take place. In the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania the Germans went to great lengths to lead ghetto populations to believe that those Jews whom they removed from the ghettos were being taken to work camps elsewhere. In the Minsk ghetto they made little effort to hide their massacres of Jews but killed Jews openly inside the ghetto. Elsewhere in Byelorussia, they also massacred Jews openly. Ya'akov Grinstein, his wife, Bella, and their baby were among those exempted from the massacre of the Jews of the town of Uzda, west of Minsk. They were marched out of their house and placed in the main hall of a local restaurant, along with other skilled Jewish workers and their families. From the windows of the restaurant they saw trucks full of Jews passing by. During the night they heard shots and screams, and then the trucks returning, empty. There was no doubt in their minds about what had happened to their relatives and friends.<sup>32</sup>

Nor did the Germans hide their massacres of Jews from the local Byelorussian population. Ya'akov Mogilnitzky, thirteen years old when his family was forced into a hastily constructed ghetto in the northern Byelorussian town of Sumilina, left the ghetto by crawling under a fence at his mother's insistence; she told him that she felt that something bad was going to happen, and she demanded that he leave. He took food and money with him and slept in the forest. Several days later he went back to the ghetto. Along the road he encountered some local peasants, who, seeing that he was walking in the direction of the ghetto, told him not to go there and asked if he was a Jew. He said that he was not, but they insisted that he was. "You are a Jew," one of them said. "Don't go there, all the Jews were killed there."<sup>33</sup>

Given the openness with which the Germans massacred Jews in Byelorussia, when they embarked on large-scale massacres in the Minsk ghetto, ghetto inhabitants had little doubt about their intentions. Unlike Jews in the Polish and Lithuanian ghettos, who used the German term "Aktion," the Minsk Jews used the traditional Russian term "pogrom" for the massacres that began with the removal of thousands of Jews from the ghetto. The first of these took place on November 7, 1941. The date was the twenty-fourth anniversary of the October Revolution, a day ordinarily celebrated in Minsk by Jews and non-Jews with parties among friends and family. On the morning of the November 7 German soldiers and their Byelorussian and Ukrainian auxiliaries entered the ghetto and surrounded a several-block area in the southeastern corner, bordered by Nemiga on the southern edge of the ghetto, Respublikanskaya, Khlebny, and Zamkovaya. They marched up and down Zamkovaya and the

smaller streets west of it, entering houses and forcing all whom they found onto the street and into columns. They placed banners that read “Long Live the Bolshevik Revolution” in the hands of those at the head of at least one column, and took photographs, which were later published in a German-run newspaper in Minsk.<sup>34</sup>

Mikhail Novodorsky, who was a child at the time and survived the pogrom by breaking away from a column and running into another part of the ghetto, recalled that when Germans entered the house in which his family lived, they beat the inhabitants and called them Communists and said that there were people in the street with red flags and that the Germans were trying to suppress the rebellion.<sup>35</sup> Apparently the Germans felt the need to justify their massacres of Jews in the eyes of the Byelorussian population, and perhaps of their own soldiers as well, by staging scenes in which Jews appeared to be Communists. But the Germans’ expectation that the local population would applaud the massacre of Jews once Jews were identified with Communism was misplaced. Outside the Soviet Union such an equation could be turned against the Jews. But inside formerly Soviet Byelorussia it failed. Locals, other than those hired by the Germans as police, did not take part in pogroms but were, according to German memos, mostly afraid that they would be next.<sup>36</sup> Such fears were well grounded. By the latter part of the war Germans had begun conducting massacres of Byelorussians in villages situated within partisan territory, on the assumption that they were supporters of the partisans. Hundreds of Byelorussian villages were destroyed in the course of German efforts to stamp out the partisans.

By conducting the November 7 pogrom, and later ones as well, during the daytime, after the columns of working Jews had left the ghetto, the Germans targeted children, women (those who remained home to care for children), the old, the sick, and the disabled. On November 7, 1941, thousands of Jews—probably numbering between 12,000 and 17,000 in total—were marched out of the ghetto, placed in trucks, and taken to Tuchinka, an execution area outside Minsk, where they were murdered.<sup>37</sup> The Judenrat had heard rumors that a “constriction of the ghetto territory” was to take place on this day and had informed the underground of this. Both the Judenrat and the underground interpreted this to mean that the ghetto would become smaller, and yet more crowded, not that a massacre would take place. A member of the nascent underground in the Russian district was sent to Tuchinka. He concealed himself in a tree, observed the massacre, left after dark, and reported on what he had seen.<sup>38</sup> Over the following days a few survivors of the massacre,

who had been shot but not killed and had crawled out of pits filled with dead bodies after dark, returned to the ghetto, where their stories circulated among the remaining population.<sup>39</sup>

On November 20 the Germans returned to the ghetto and conducted another pogrom east of the area in which the previous pogrom had taken place, from Zamkovaya to the eastern border of the ghetto. Descriptions of this pogrom are sketchier than those of the first, probably because the two pogroms were separated by less than two weeks, and in the memories of ghetto survivors they may have merged into one long nightmare. After escaping the pogrom of November 7 Mikhail Novodorsky had found refuge in the Jewish Hospital, where his uncle worked as a doctor. Mikhail's older brother had also escaped the November 7 pogrom and was now living in the area affected by the pogrom, farther down the hill. On the morning of November 20 Mikhail was on his way to visit his brother. From Jubilee Square he began walking down Respublikanskaya. Looking down the hill, he saw the Germans marching a column of Jews down Respublikanskaya. Through a line of policemen he caught his last glimpse of his brother. Somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 Jews were taken to Tuchinka and killed.<sup>40</sup>

Much of the area emptied by these two pogroms was now excluded from the ghetto. The fence was moved, and houses now located outside the ghetto were opened to the Byelorussian population. Meanwhile trainloads of Jews from central Europe, many of them from Hamburg, Germany, were being brought to Minsk. Many were shot upon arrival. Thousands were brought to the Minsk ghetto, where several "Sonderghettos," or Special Ghettos, were established for them. Ultimately the central European Jews, whom the Russian Jews referred to as "the German Jews" or "the Hamburg Jews," were concentrated in an area southwest of Respublikanskaya, which was surrounded with barbed wire. Here a ghetto within a ghetto was established, with its own Judenrat and Jewish police force. Contact between the two Jewish populations was forbidden and therefore very limited, especially within the ghetto, though many Russian and German Jews became acquainted at work. The German authorities showed their preference for the German Jews by giving them larger food rations and in many cases less grueling work. But the German Jews were nevertheless ultimately much worse off than the Russian Jews, because they could not communicate with the Byelorussian population or trade with them directly. Many of the German Jews had items that were valuable for trade, such as well-made clothes, watches, and jewelry, and some were able to make arrangements with Byelorussian Jews whom they met

at work, who traded these items with Byelorussians, for a commission. Despite such trade many of the German Jews starved.

Many German Jews apparently believed that they would survive the war because for an extended period they were exempted from the violence inflicted upon the rest of the ghetto. In a postwar interview, Hersh Smolar said that the underground attempted to make contact with the German Jews to warn them of the intentions of the Germans and urge them to join in resistance. One young Czech Jew, who said that his father was a member of the Czech government in exile in London, welcomed this contact and was sent to the partisans by the underground. One Social Democrat among the German Jews helped the underground to prepare leaflets in German to be spread among German troops, but said that this was all he was willing to do. Others contacted by the underground refused to engage in resistance in any way. Their attitude, Smolar said, was "that's for the Eastern Jews, not for us."<sup>41</sup> According to Ya'akov Grinstein, another member of the ghetto underground, the German Jews were convinced that the Germans would not hurt them.<sup>42</sup>

After November 20 there were no more large-scale pogroms for several months, partly because of the need of the German authorities in Minsk for skilled Jewish workers, and partly due to the winter weather. The winter of 1941-42 was extraordinarily cold, even by Byelorussian standards, and the ground was frozen. A report of the security police and SD stated: "Actions [of] mass liquidations of Jews, even if allowed by economic considerations, are impossible under the present weather conditions because the deeply frozen ground is extremely hard for digging graves for mass burials."<sup>43</sup> Harassment of Jews in the ghetto continued, including shootings. A small market began operating in the ghetto on Krimskaya Street, near the ghetto's northern border. In violation of German orders, bits of food and items such as tobacco and alcohol were sold. On occasion Germans entered the market and shot those whom they found there. Sometimes the Germans engaged in murders in the ghetto simply for their own entertainment, as when they rounded up the most beautiful young Jewish women they could find, marched them to the Jewish cemetery, forced them to undress, and shot them. Despite these murders the cessation of large-scale pogroms during the winter of 1941-42 gave the ghetto population something of a respite, and the underground a chance to organize.

On March 2, 1942, a third major pogrom took place in the ghetto. March 2 was the date of the Jewish holiday of Purim in 1942. As in the case of the November 7 pogrom, the Germans chose a holiday widely

celebrated among Jews to conduct a massacre, and again it was a holiday celebrating a victory. Purim recalls the story of Esther, who saved the Jewish people from annihilation by the evil King Ahashueras. As in previous pogroms the Germans and their auxiliaries surrounded the ghetto in the morning, after the working columns had left, entered it, and began rounding Jews up, seizing them on the ghetto's streets and forcing them out of their houses. The Germans had asked the Judenrat to provide a "special work force" of 5,000 for them on this day; the Judenrat had refused, suspecting that a pogrom was to take place, and rumors of an impending pogrom had circulated through the ghetto. Those who were able to do so left the ghetto to stay with friends. Others hid in malinas. As a result the Germans were not able to find 5,000 Jews in the ghetto and to meet this quota waited at the ghetto gate for returning working columns. In some cases they separated skilled from unskilled workers and murdered those without special skills. Approximately 6,000 Jews were killed during this pogrom. Some were taken to camps outside Minsk and shot. Thousands were marched to a ravine at the end of Ratomskaya Street called "Yama," or the pit, which at this point lay just outside the ghetto. They were forced to stand at the edge of the ravine and then were shot.<sup>44</sup>

The most massive pogrom in the ghetto began on July 28 and continued for four days. This pogrom, like previous ones, began after columns of working Jews left the ghetto in the morning. As in the case of earlier pogroms there had been warning rumors, and many Jews were able to hide. Because this pogrom took place over several days, it was difficult even for survivors to estimate the numbers involved. Postwar estimates ranged from 18,000 to 30,000 killed. Approximately thirty trucks and four "soul-killers," or mobile gas trucks, made five to six trips to and from the ghetto a day for four days.<sup>45</sup> Some Jews working outside the ghetto were lodged for the duration of the pogrom in a camp set up outside the ghetto.<sup>46</sup> Others were taken from their workplaces, put in trucks, and then taken away to be killed.<sup>47</sup> During the Great Pogrom of July 28–31, the German Jews who had survived up to that point were ordered to pack their things and assemble at the gate of their ghetto for relocation. They did so and were put in gas trucks, which the Germans had recently begun to use in Minsk, and which the Byelorussians and Jews called "soul-killers." Smolar, who watched this roundup from the attic of the Jewish Hospital, recounted seeing the German Jews standing at the gate of their ghetto, holding suitcases and umbrellas. He estimated that 5,000 were murdered at this time.<sup>48</sup>

After the July 1942 pogrom only about 12,000 Jews remained in the ghetto.<sup>49</sup> For more than a year there were no more pogroms, but killings continued to take place regularly in the ghetto, many apparently random, but some targeting those less capable of productive work. Ya'akov Grinstein later wrote that once when he was marching out of the ghetto to work in the morning, a German removed a young boy from the column and shot him.<sup>50</sup> Prior to the March 2 pogrom, groups departing from the ghetto for the forest were in most cases those organized and led by the underground. At that time, it had been so difficult for those outside the underground to find partisan units in the forest, and gain admission into them, that the chances of survival for those leaving the ghetto on their own had been very slim. The March 2 pogrom convinced many Jews who had previously hesitated that leaving the ghetto was worth the risk, especially since increasing numbers of partisan units were open to taking volunteers, including unarmed Jewish volunteers. The ghetto underground was now beginning to play a role in the formation of some partisan units; information about the location of these units and others had filtered through the ghetto, and increasing numbers of ghetto Jews set out to find them. After the Great Pogrom of July 1942 the number of Jews in the ghetto steadily decreased, due to flight to the forest as well as German murders.

In September 1943 the Germans began preparing to annihilate the ghetto. At this time the Germans gathered thousands of Jews in the Shirokaya Street concentration camp in Minsk to be killed. Mikhail (Misha) Treister, sixteen years old at the time, was taken from his workplace, the shoemaking department of the October factory, where clothes were produced for the German army (see fig. 7). He and the other Jews working in that department were put in a truck and driven away. Misha waited to see if the truck would take the fork toward Trostiniets, a death camp, or Shirokaya, a camp where both prisoners of war and Jews were held before being transferred to death camps (or they died of hunger, disease, or abuse). If the truck were heading toward Trostiniets, he thought, he would jump out the back and take the chance of being shot as he did so. If the truck were to go toward Shirokaya, he would have some time to think of some way out. The truck took the fork toward Shirokaya.

Misha found himself in the courtyard of the Shirokaya camp with thousands of other Jewish men. After a day or so Nahum Epstein, now effectively in charge of the ghetto, appeared in the camp with German officers. The men in the courtyard were called to attention. Epstein announced that a mistake had been made: there were thirty-six men among



Figure 7. Mikhail Treister. Photograph courtesy of Mikhail Treister.

those who had been brought to the camp whom the Germans wanted to keep alive, because they were specialists in various areas of work and were such good workmen that they could not be spared. Epstein began reading off the names, and after each name, a man would call out, "Here I am," and go to the front of the crowd, forming a line. When Epstein called the name "Iosif Kaplan," there was a second or two of silence. Then Misha heard his own voice calling out, "Here I am."

Misha proceeded to the front of the crowd and joined the line. Epstein was acquainted with Misha because Epstein's associate, Rosenblatt, lived in a room adjacent to the room in which Misha, his sister, and mother lived, and anyone who visited Rosenblatt had to go through the room occupied by the Treister family. Epstein looked a little startled when Misha joined the line, but said nothing. The thought crossed Misha's mind that as a scrawny sixteen year old he probably did not look the part of an expert workman. But his presence in the line was not questioned. The thirty-six were returned to the ghetto. In the meantime, someone had discovered that yet another mistake had been made: about half the names had been placed on the list by mistake. The men were put in the Minsk prison while the names were checked, so that those whose skills were not required could be returned to Shirokaya. Kaplan, it turned out, was in fact an expert specialist requested by the Germans. Misha was freed from the prison the next morning. He went home, hid for several days, knowing



that if his deception were discovered he would be killed, and then left for the forest with two friends. He joined a partisan unit and returned to the ghetto for his sister and mother. By that time any rumor that someone was leaving for the forest was enough to gather a crowd demanding to be included. Misha was forced to organize three groups that left the ghetto simultaneously; he knew this was far too many to leave the ghetto together safely, but he had no choice. His group reached the forest successfully. German troops ambushed the other two groups, and most of their members were killed.<sup>51</sup>

Mikhail Treister's story is a reminder of the fact that we know about the Minsk ghetto from those who survived it, and that the odds against survival were enormous. Unless others among the group released from Shirokaya as expert workmen escaped from the ghetto, Treister may have been the sole survivor among the thousands in the Shirokaya courtyard on that day. If Iosif Kaplan had not been on the list of expert workmen needed by the Germans, Treister would not have survived. And among those whom he led out of the ghetto about half were killed along the way. Those who were willing to take risks were likely to have a better chance of surviving than those who did not, but survival also required lucky breaks, in most cases not just once, but repeatedly.

The last pogrom, and the final liquidation of the Minsk ghetto, took place on October 21, 1943. For several days prior to this guards had been posted around the ghetto to prevent anyone from either entering or escaping. On the October 21 the ghetto was surrounded, and with the help of Epstein, Rosenblatt, and others in their group, most of the approximately 2,000 Jews remaining in the ghetto were driven out, placed in trucks, and driven to death camps or work camps.<sup>52</sup> Germans and police searched the ghetto for malinas, shot those whom they found in hiding, and threw grenades into places where they thought malinas might be located. A small number of Jews were in hiding places that remained undetected, and a yet smaller number survived the experience. Rosa Zuckerman, whose story will be told in a later chapter, remained in an underground malina for thirteen days, before it was deemed safe enough to leave and contact a Byelorussian friend, who took Rosa, her cousin, and her uncle to partisan territory.<sup>53</sup> Aaron Fiterson, a member of the ghetto underground who left the ghetto in the summer of 1943 and joined a partisan unit, returned to Minsk in 1944, after it was liberated by the Red Army, and met a man named Bubler, whom he had known before the war. Bubler told Fiterson that he had been among seventeen Jews who, before the ghetto was annihilated, constructed an underground

chamber in the Jewish cemetery. They disguised its entry and exit with planks, and they inserted tin pipes that allowed some air in, but not enough; many in the hiding place died of lack of air. The exit led to the border of the ghetto, making contact with the Russian district possible, and a connection was established with a Byelorussian woman, an acquaintance of those in hiding. She brought food, and when the Red Army arrived in July 1944, she told Red Army soldiers about the Jews in hiding. They went to the Jewish cemetery and dragged out those who remained alive. Bubler and Fiterson searched for the Byelorussian woman but could not find her, because her house had been burnt, and she had disappeared.<sup>54</sup>

# The Ghetto Underground

## SECRET GROUPS IN THE GHETTO

Within weeks after the establishment of the Minsk ghetto on August 1, 1941, secret groups were formed in the ghetto, consisting mostly of Communists and some non-Communists whom they trusted. One group consisted largely of members of the Komsomol, the Communist youth organization, and another, which was to play a major role in bringing these groups together in an underground organization, included several Communists from Poland and elsewhere outside Byelorussia, who had fled eastward to escape the German attack. Relatively small numbers of people, at most several dozen, were involved in these groups. Out of a Minsk population of nearly 239,000 just before the German attack, there had been 8,131 registered Communists and 2,514 candidates for party membership (but 23,000 members of Komsomol, to which virtually all high school students belonged).<sup>1</sup> Many Communists and the vast majority of Komsomol members never participated in the underground, hoping to survive the war without coming to the attention of the Germans.

During August and September 1941 there were at least four secret groups in the ghetto, whose members gradually became aware of each other's existence and established contact with each other. During the same period a similar process was taking place outside the ghetto in the area that the Jews tended to call "the Russian district," and the Byelorussians

“the city.” Through the fall of 1941 people hoping to engage in resistance were reaching out to like-minded people wherever they could find them: within the ghetto, within the Russian district, between the two areas, and between each of these areas and the forests around Minsk, where partisan units were forming. Most of the members of the secret groups were adults in their twenties, thirties, and forties, and in a few cases even older, but there were also some younger people, including members of Komso-mol and young Red Army soldiers who had found themselves trapped in occupied territory and who managed to hide in Minsk. There were also a number of Jewish teenagers who went in and out of the ghetto regularly and who played key roles in putting the secret groups inside and outside the ghetto in touch with each other, and groups on both sides of the ghetto border in touch with partisan units.

During these early months resistance activity was spontaneous, decentralized, and somewhat chaotic. Each group decided on its own activities, sometimes in consultation with members of other secret groups with which it was in touch. No one knew the extent of underground activity as a whole, and sometimes the activities of secret groups overlapped. Lena Maizles was a member of a secret group in the ghetto that had undertaken to produce and circulate leaflets giving information about the war and calling for resistance. At one point a member of her group who worked in the Russian district told her that a Communist leaflet was being circulated in the city. She managed to obtain a copy of this leaflet: it turned out that it was one of those produced by her group and edited by her.<sup>2</sup>

In August and September 1941 members of these secret groups tended to use the word “resistance” rather than “underground” to describe their activity, because they belonged to informal, autonomous groups, and for the moment they were not thinking of going beyond that. This was not out of any adherence to principles of decentralization, but rather for the opposite reason: as Communists, they were reluctant to disregard the authority of the party leadership by forming an underground organization when they had not been authorized to do so. With the leadership of the Byelorussian Communist Party having fled across the front, the party no longer existed in occupied Byelorussia. Communists who remained in occupied territory had no party structure to answer to, no orders to follow; their party membership was in abeyance, and those who survived the war would have to reapply for their party cards after the liberation in order to regain their status as Communists. But they remained Communists in the eyes of the Germans, who targeted them for arrest. Many continued to regard themselves as Communists and tried to behave in the

way that they thought Communists should under such circumstances. They were confident that they had the right to meet in small groups to discuss what they could do to oppose the German occupation and contribute to a Red Army victory, but many felt that to go beyond this and form an underground organization would violate Communist Party procedures.

In the early months of the German occupation most members of the secret groups in Minsk were confident that the leaders of the Communist Party had left a committee behind assigned to form a Communist underground; rumors circulated that some members of the Communist leadership had remained behind, in hiding, and would soon make contact with party members.<sup>3</sup> Thus forming an underground organization would usurp the role of the committee charged with this task. There were a few, however, who either did not share this confidence or at least thought that in the meantime it would be a good idea for those in the secret groups to form more cohesive ties among themselves. In the ghetto, this view was held by members of a secret group that consisted mostly of Communists from outside Byelorussia; several were from Poland. Members of this group began establishing contacts with other secret groups in the ghetto and arguing in favor of establishing a ghetto-wide underground organization. In the Russian district, a group of oil workers, refugees from Poland, were at the center of a larger group that also began to establish contacts with a number of secret groups and explore the idea of forming a Minsk-wide underground organization.

Sometime in October 1941 a Jewish teenager who lived in the Russian district but often visited the ghetto arranged a meeting between the leaders of these two networks; this meeting opened the way to the later formation of a Minsk-wide underground organization. After the citywide underground was formed, the formerly autonomous secret groups inside and outside the ghetto became part of a clearly defined hierarchical structure. But at the same time the Minsk underground retained much of its earlier spontaneous and even decentralized character. Many of the projects that were sponsored and promoted by the underground leadership were initiated by members of secret groups who seized upon opportunities for sabotage, for producing and circulating propaganda, or for saving the lives of Jews in the ghetto. Such efforts frequently involved underground members from various groups working together, often across the ghetto border; sometimes they entailed underground members drawing nonmembers into activity, and this often entailed links between Byelorussians and Jews. The support and direction that the underground

leadership provided made underground activity much more extensive and effective than it would have been otherwise. But the underground's quick growth into a mass movement also made it vulnerable: twice the city leadership was destroyed by waves of arrests. These arrests did not affect the ghetto nearly as severely as they did the Russian district, largely because what members of the underground referred to as the "rules of conspiracy" were followed much more strictly in the ghetto than outside it. In the wake of large-scale arrests of leading activists, the informal networks among rank-and-file underground members were important in sustaining underground activity outside the ghetto, and connections between the ghetto and the Russian district.

#### THE FORMATION OF THE GHETTO UNDERGROUND

The leading figure in the secret group in the ghetto that spearheaded the formation of a ghetto underground organization was Hersh Smolar, thirty-six years old, a Polish Communist, and a refugee from Bialystok, where he had worked as a journalist at the Communist publishing house.<sup>4</sup> Smolar was a well-known Communist in Byelorussia as well as in Poland; during the 1920s the Polish Communist Party had sent him to Minsk for several years to protect him from arrest by the Polish authorities. Smolar knew Russian well. The group that he headed included several Communists from outside Byelorussia and also several Minsk Communists. Upon its formation, this group decided to engage in propaganda (which involved writing and circulating leaflets with information about the war and calls for resistance), to approach potential allies outside the ghetto, and also to make contact with other secret groups in the ghetto and bring them together into an underground organization.<sup>5</sup>

Smolar and his group soon came in contact with a group headed by Nahum Feldman, forty-one years old, a Communist Party member, and a printer. The group included a number of printers, along with people of other professions. Several would later play important roles in the underground, including Lena (Yenta) Maizles, forty-two years old, a Communist functionary before the war, who became the head of an underground group; Zyama Okun, thirty-four years old, also a Communist, who later joined the ghetto police on the orders of the underground, and became the head of an underground group; and Misha Chipchin, thirty-nine years old, the former technical director of the Stalin Printing House, the largest printing house in Minsk, who later operated an underground press.<sup>6</sup>

Feldman and his group hoped to flee to the forest and either join one of the partisan units rumored to be located there or form its own. In the meantime, they had decided that since there were a number of printers in the group, their contribution to resistance would be the establishment of an underground press. Several members of the group worked in the Proryv Printing House, outside the ghetto, where a newspaper aimed at Germans in Minsk, soldiers and others, was now being printed under German direction. The members of the secret group working in this printing house had made contact with some others, Jews and Byelorussian prisoners of war, working in the same printing press, and they were making plans to smuggle materials for a printing press into the ghetto. A member of the secret group had kept a radio, against German orders. Members of the group were listening to Soviet broadcasts about the war, writing leaflets by hand, and distributing them in the ghetto. Some of these leaflets were given to contacts in the city and were circulating there as well.<sup>7</sup>

Sometime in October 1941 Smolar met with Feldman and his group and raised the question of forming an underground organization in the ghetto. At this meeting, Feldman and his comrades at first resisted Smolar's proposal. They said that they did not want to preempt the legitimate underground committee, which no doubt had been left behind by the Communist leaders who had fled Minsk. They had come together, they said, not to form an underground organization, but to consider how they, as individuals, could oppose the German occupation and support a Soviet victory. Lena Maizles wrote after the war that they, like other Communists, Komsomol members, and other pro-Soviet people they knew, assumed that somewhere in the city there was a committee preparing to organize an underground struggle against the Germans.<sup>8</sup> Feldman asked Smolar who had authorized him to establish an underground organization. Smolar responded that he and his group were in touch with people "on the other side." Smolar later wrote that he thought Feldman took this to mean that Smolar was in contact with the Communist authorities, which was not the case.<sup>9</sup> But Smolar did not correct the misunderstanding. Whether or not this was the reason, Nahum Feldman and his group decided to support Smolar and his group in forming an underground organization in the ghetto. Feldman and Zyama Okun, another member of his group, were included in the underground leadership committee already created by Smolar's group, and Okun was instructed to join the ghetto police, so as to be the representative of the underground within it.<sup>10</sup>

There were other underground groups in the ghetto at this time as well. Boris Chaimovich, thirty-one years old and a member of the Communist Party, had been in Drozdy, was sent to the Minsk prison, and from there was released into the newly formed ghetto, where he made contact with members of Smolar's group and was aware of their efforts to create an underground center in the ghetto.<sup>11</sup> He also became acquainted with Nechama (Nadya) Ruditzer, twenty-five years old and a Komsomol member, along with her husband, Yosef, and her brother, Misha; all three were named Ruditzer, because Nechama's maiden name was Ruditzer, and this was also the name of her husband. Nechama had saved a friend of her husband's, Abram Relkin, from the Drozdy camp by bringing him women's clothes; later she and Relkin had returned and saved more people, and Relkin became a member of their secret group as well. When Chaimovich met Nechama and her circle, they told him about the rescues from Drozdy, and also that they had kept a radio and were secretly listening to news broadcasts. Chaimovich, deciding that Nechama, her husband, brother, and their friends could be trusted, had joined them in listening to Soviet broadcasts and in writing and distributing leaflets with information about the war and calls for resistance.<sup>12</sup>

Another secret group was organized by Mikhail, or Misha, Gebelev, thirty-six years old, a Communist Party member, and formerly a propagandist, or educator, for a division of the Minsk Communist Party.<sup>13</sup> Gebelev's group, like the Chaimovich/Ruditzer group, was involved in propaganda. One member of the group had managed to steal a radio from the German warehouse where confiscated radios were kept, with the help of a prisoner of war who worked in the warehouse, and another member of the group had stolen a typewriter from a police station in Minsk, also with the help of a prisoner of war who worked in the police station. With the radio set and typewriter, the group was able to listen to broadcasts by the Soviet Information Bureau, write leaflets, and distribute them inside and outside the ghetto.<sup>14</sup> Another group, which eventually came to be led by Motye (Meir or Matvei) Pruslin, had begun to form before the ghetto was established. When the Germans took the men of Minsk to the camp at Drozdy, a Komsomol member named Tzypa Botvinik-Lupian, along with her Komsomol friends Slava Gebeleva-Astashinskaya and Rakhil Kublina and Communist Party member Rosa Lipskaya, collected clothes in addition to food and went to the camp to give them to prisoners of war so they could discard their military clothing and go to the civilians' section of the camp. When they ran out of men's clothes they began bringing women's clothes, which enabled about



fifteen prisoners of war to escape. Later, after the ghetto was established, these women became members of the underground group headed by Motye Pruslin; when he left for the forest in March 1942, Rosa Lipskaya became the head of the group.<sup>15</sup>

All of these groups were formed in the first month or two of the ghetto's existence, and connections among them developed quickly, largely because many members of the groups were Communists, and Communists in the ghetto sought each other out, having known each other before the war. Smolar remembered Chaimovich's presence at the meeting at which his group decided to form an underground center.<sup>16</sup> Chaimovich did not remember having been present at that meeting but did remember having met with members of Smolar's group on other occasions.<sup>17</sup> Lena Maizles wrote that at the end of August or beginning of September she met Misha Gebelev and Motye Pruslin, and that she understood that both of them headed secret groups similar to the one that she belonged to.<sup>18</sup> Over the course of the fall of 1941 these groups attached themselves to the underground center formed by Smolar and his group. Feldman's group was the first to join; others followed. A system of "desyatkas," or units of ten, was adopted: each unit would consist of ten members (more or less) and would have a leader who would maintain contact with the underground center. The other members of the desyatkas were to remain anonymous, their identities unknown to the underground outside these groups, in case a member of the underground center was arrested and interrogated. Over time the number of groups in the ghetto grew; some groups expanded and were split into two, and new groups were created. Ultimately there were at least sixteen desyatkas in the ghetto. Since this number is based on the testimony of surviving members of the underground, it is possible that there were more, all of whose members were killed during the war, and which the underground members who survived were unaware of. This number does not include the Komsomol groups within the underground organization. Smolar estimated after the war that the ghetto underground consisted of about 450 people, including about 150 in Komsomol groups.<sup>19</sup>

In the course of all these contacts, a ghetto underground movement took shape, with Smolar's group at its center. At first the steering committee consisted of Smolar and two other members of his group, but the latter two were soon killed. The first to be killed was Jacob Kirkayeshto, who was caught in one of the raids that the Germans conducted in the ghetto during August. While leaving a meeting of his underground group he was chased and shot, but he managed to lead the German away from



Figure 8. *Bottom row, left to right:* Hersh Smolar, Misha Gebelev, and Motye Pruslin. Photograph courtesy of the Belarussian State Museum of Film, Phono, and Photo Documents.

the house where the meeting had been conducted, and thus was able to protect his comrades.<sup>20</sup> The second member of the underground Committee of Three to be killed was Notke Waynhoyz, formerly the editor of a popular children's magazine published in Minsk. He was swept up and killed in the first pogrom that the Germans conducted in the ghetto, on November 7, 1941. Misha Gebelev took Kirkayeshto's place on the Committee of Three, and Motye Pruslin took Waynhoyz's place (see fig. 8). Both Gebelev, thirty-seven years old, and Pruslin, thirty-six years old, were members of the Communist Party; both had been "propagandists," or educators, for sections of the Minsk Communist Party before the war. Both had close ties with Communists in the Russian district, but this was especially true of Gebelev, who later became the ghetto underground's representative on the leading body of the Minsk-wide underground organization. Gebelev was probably the leading figure in the ghetto underground until his death in the summer of 1942, after which Smolar moved into this position.<sup>21</sup>

When Smolar told Feldman and his group that he was in touch with "the other side," he did not mean (as he supposed that Feldman and the others thought) that he was in touch with the Communist authorities on the other side of the front. What he actually meant was that he and other members of his group were pursuing contacts with underground groups outside the ghetto, both in the city (which Jews referred to as "the Russian district," because Russian was spoken there, unlike the ghetto, where Yiddish was spoken) and in the forest. In the first months of the German occupation, secret groups had been formed in the Russian district,

as in the ghetto. Members of these groups, like most members of the secret groups in the ghetto, believed that there was a committee somewhere in the city that had been charged with forming an underground movement; they hoped that it would reveal itself soon. As in the ghetto, one group, consisting of oil workers, a number of them refugees from Bialystok, had taken on the role of contacting the various secret groups and functioning as a center for them. Isai Kazinietz, a refugee from Bialystok, where he had worked as an engineer in a Soviet oil firm, had emerged as the central figure in the effort to create a network of secret groups in the city. Kazinietz, like Smolar, was interested in establishing contacts with partisan units in the forest, and also across the border between the ghetto and the city.

#### INTERSECTING NETWORKS OF UNDERGROUND CONNECTIONS

The first contacts between the ghetto and the city, and between the ghetto and the forest, were made by two Jewish teenagers who, counting on their flawless Russian and their “good” looks (they did not look stereotypically Jewish), had taken the chance of remaining outside the ghetto but regularly entered the ghetto to visit family and friends. Seventeen-year-old David Gertsik, who went by the Russian nickname Zhenka, was introduced to Smolar by his father during one of Zhenka’s visits to the ghetto. Zhenka said that he thought he could put Smolar in touch with people in the city who were forming an underground network. Sometime in either late October or early November 1941, Zhenka led Smolar out of the ghetto through the hole in the fence that he used for his visits to an apartment just outside the ghetto, where two men and a woman were waiting for him.<sup>22</sup> One of the men introduced himself to Smolar as “Slavek.” This was Isai Kazinietz, the emerging leader of the network of secret groups in the city; Slavek, or “Glory,” was one of his underground pseudonyms. Smolar later described him as a warm, friendly young man of about thirty dressed in civilian clothes but with a military bearing; he wrote that Slavek had been accompanied by a woman with long, dark hair, wearing a red beret.<sup>23</sup> The woman was Lola Revinskaya, also a member of one of the secret groups in the city, and Kazinietz’s partner (see fig. 9). The identity of the second man present has never been established.

Smolar and Kazinietz exchanged information, confirming that both represented secret pro-Soviet groups, and Smolar described the beginnings of an underground organization in the ghetto. Kazinietz asked the



Figure 9. Isai Kazinietz and his partner, Elena (Lola, or Lilya) Revinskaya. Photograph courtesy of the Belarussian State Museum of Film, Phono, and Photo Documents.

same question that Feldman had asked: who had authorized Smolar to create such an organization? This time Smolar answered, more straightforwardly, that no one had. He quoted Lenin to the effect that when revolutionaries find themselves in difficult situations, they must take the initiative rather than waiting for directives from above. Kazinietz argued that there was surely a committee somewhere in the city with orders from the Communist leaders to organize an underground movement, and that it would not do to usurp its role. Smolar responded that if such a committee existed, the best way to discover it would be to create an underground organization. The two men agreed that they would be in touch again, through Zhenka. Zhenka and Smolar returned to the ghetto through the same hole in the fence by which they had left. Later, Kazinietz gave Smolar the underground pseudonym “Skromny” (Modest One), which embarrassed Smolar by its immodesty. But there was nothing that Smolar could do about it; in the underground, those in positions of greater authority had the power to bestow whatever pseudonyms, or nicknames, they chose. In an interview after the war, Smolar interpreted Kazinietz’s

decision to give him this name as a sign that Kazinietz had believed that Smolar was actually a member of the Communist International but was too modest to say so. Smolar also argued that Kazinietz was persuaded to form a centralized underground organization by Smolar's arguments in favor of it, and perhaps also by his belief that Smolar represented the Communist authorities.<sup>24</sup>

The first contact between the ghetto underground and a partisan unit also came through a Jewish teenager. Fedya (short for Fyodor) Shedletsky, like Zhenka, seventeen years old, had remained outside the ghetto and wanted to find a way of taking part in resistance. A high-school friend, Misha Ruditzer, who lived in the ghetto with his sister, Nechama, and her husband, Yosef, but also spent time in the city, introduced Fedya to a former Red Army officer, Danil Kudriakov, who was in hiding in Minsk. Kudriakov warned the two young men that the Germans intended to kill all the Jews, and introduced Shedletsky to an artist who created false papers for him in the name of a Byelorussian. Kudriakov also introduced Fedya to Kazinietz. Kazinietz, treating Fedya as a member of the incipient underground movement, told him that he had heard that there were partisans in the Rudensk district, south of Minsk, and assigned him to find them and establish contact with them. Fedya located an acquaintance in Minsk who had relatives in a village in that district, went to the village, and with the help of his contact located a partisan unit headed by a Captain Bystrov (also called Sergeev; Bystrov was a nickname, meaning "Fast One"). He became its liaison to the underground in the city. Bystrov's first request of his newfound allies in the city was that they send him a cooking pot. He was also open to the possibility of accepting groups of volunteers, especially if they brought weapons with them.

Back in the city, while preparing to lead a group to the partisan unit, Fedya was arrested and placed in a shack, not far from the ghetto, which served as a makeshift prison. By protesting to the guard that he needed to use the bathroom, and promising to return, Fedya managed to slip out of his jailor's grasp. Kudriakov had told Fedya that when he felt in danger of capture by the Germans he would hide in the ghetto. He had explained that the ghetto, though a living hell due to German violence, was nevertheless the best place to evade the Germans and their assistants, who preferred to stay out of it when they were not conducting raids. Fedya ran into the ghetto and sought refuge with his friend Misha's sister, Nechama. Thus Fedya came in contact with the secret group consisting of Nechama, her husband and brother, their friend Relkin, and Chaimovich. Fedya later obtained Bystrov's agreement to accept a group

from the ghetto consisting of members of the Chaimovich/Ruditzer group and others whom they recruited. Kudriakov, meanwhile, put them in touch with other underground members in the city, who helped to arrange the escape from the ghetto and the journey to the forest. Before the end of 1941 two groups, organized by the Chaimovich/Ruditzer group, went to the forest and were accepted into Bystrov's unit.

During one of his stays in the ghetto, Fedya heard from his friends that the head of the Judenrat, Ilya (or Elye) Mushkin, was collecting money and valuables from the Jews in the ghetto and giving them to the Germans. The Chaimovich/Ruditzer group was not entirely isolated from the other secret groups in the ghetto; Boris Chaimovich was in at least intermittent contact with members of the underground center that was being organized by Smolar and his group. Smolar was by this time aware of the fact that Mushkin, along with others in the Judenrat, was connected to secret groups in the city. But apparently Nechama and her friends did not know this and believed that Mushkin was a tool of the Germans. Fedya later recalled: "At night Misha Ruditzer and I went to the house where Mushkin lived. Both of us had guns and we had a grenade that we had brought from the [partisan] unit. Ruditzer stayed in the street. I knocked on the window. After I knocked for a second time, Mushkin let me in. When I came in, I told him that the house was surrounded and it was in his own interest to talk peacefully. I told him that I had come from a partisan unit that needed warm clothes, medicines and a cooking pot. I was surprised when he agreed to provide all this. We agreed that in three or four days we would meet at the workshops [in the ghetto, run by the Judenrat] and he would give me the supplies. I warned Mushkin that if he gave me away, he would be shot. Mushkin only smiled in response." Several days later Fedya came into the ghetto on horseback, met Mushkin at the workshops, was given the supplies, and took them to the Ruditzers' apartment, to be picked up by a member of the city underground and taken to the partisans.<sup>25</sup>

Mushkin meanwhile sent word to Smolar that a man from the forest had arrived in the ghetto, and urged the leadership of the ghetto underground to meet with him. At the meeting that ensued, the ghetto underground leaders asked Fedya to take a message to Bystrov, promising more supplies and asking for permission to send a group of volunteers from the ghetto. Before these negotiations were completed, the ghetto underground had become a part of a Minsk-wide underground, and the City Committee, which governed the underground as a whole, had taken over responsibility for contacts with partisan units. But in the meantime

the two groups organized by the Chaimovich/Ruditzer underground group had left the ghetto and had been accepted into Bystrov's unit. Fedya eventually ceased functioning as a liaison for the unit and became one of its fighting members. For some time, even after the City Committee took over the conduct of negotiations with partisan units, Bystrov's unit remained a major destination for groups from the ghetto, but after several months the unit moved to the Moghilev region, on the eastern edge of Byelorussia, and its contacts with the Minsk underground and the ghetto were broken.<sup>26</sup>

When Smolar met Kazinietz, he seems to have assumed that Kazinietz was a Byelorussian, or perhaps a Russian, Communist. Kazinietz was a member of the Communist Party, but he was neither Byelorussian nor Russian: he was a Jew, a refugee to Minsk from Bialystok, and originally from Ukraine. The Germans discovered that Kazinietz was a Jew when they arrested him in March 1942, but in the underground only those in the circle immediately around Kazinietz knew of his Jewish identity. It was not mentioned within the underground, presumably because according to the Soviet view, distinguishing between Jews and non-Jews was anti-Semitic; to have made a point of Kazinietz's Jewish origins would have betrayed a bad attitude. Furthermore, wide knowledge of this fact, even within the underground, could have endangered Kazinietz, especially if it had reached the Germans. Apparently no one in the ghetto underground knew that Kazinietz was a Jew, during or even in the years immediately after the war.<sup>27</sup> Kazinietz was posthumously declared a Hero of the Soviet Union. In 1969, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation was celebrated in Minsk and included the unveiling of a statue of Kazinietz. Kazinietz's sister, Rachel, came to Minsk from Poland for the occasion. In speaking with a group of Soviet filmmakers who were working on a documentary about the anti-Nazi underground in Minsk, she mentioned that her brother's given name had been Joshua, and she described the Ukrainian Jewish family in which she and he had been raised. This information appeared in a Polish Yiddish newspaper, which had sent a reporter to cover the event, but not in the Soviet press.<sup>28</sup>

Escalating violence in the ghetto, carried out by the Germans and their assistants, increased the urgency felt by members of the underground to send large numbers of Jews to the forest, and thus heightened the pressure to find allies outside the ghetto. On August 14, 25, and 31, soon after the establishment of the ghetto, the Germans had conducted a series of raids in the ghetto and had killed about 5,000 ghetto residents, mostly young men.<sup>29</sup> With the end of August, the raids ceased, but in the

following months the Germans and their accomplices frequently entered the ghetto at night, forced their way into houses chosen apparently at random, and killed those whom they found inside. In November German violence escalated dramatically with the pogroms of November 7 and 20, in which at least 17,000 Jews and possibly thousands more were killed.<sup>30</sup>

By the time the first pogrom took place, the ghetto underground and the Judenrat were working together closely. Sometime after Smolar's first meeting with Kazinietz outside the ghetto, Kazinietz had come into the ghetto for a meeting with the leaders of the ghetto underground. It is likely that this meeting took place in the latter part of October, because it was at this meeting that the ghetto leadership agreed to establish a regular connection with the Judenrat, and that connection clearly existed prior to the November 7 pogrom. For his meeting with the ghetto leaders, Zhenka brought Kazinietz into the ghetto and to the Jewish Hospital. There was already a strong connection between the ghetto underground and the Jewish Hospital, because Dr. Leib Kulik,<sup>31</sup> the director of the hospital, had offered Smolar the job of overseeing the hospital boiler and had invited him to live in the boiler room and take his meals there. The boiler room became the underground's informal headquarters. Underground leaders were able to meet in relative safety because the Germans avoided entering the hospital, out of their fear of contagious diseases, especially typhus. Many members of the hospital staff developed connections with the underground, and they, too, often met in the boiler room, to hear reports on the war and exchange information. Dr. Leib Kulik had offered his office as the site of the meeting between Kazinietz and the ghetto leaders, and he gave everyone attending the meeting white coats so that in the event that there should be a German inspection it would appear that a doctors' meeting was taking place.

At the meeting in Dr. Kulik's office, Kazinietz imposed two decisions upon the ghetto underground leaders, both of which they at first resisted. Kazinietz announced, first, that henceforth contacts with the partisans would be conducted by the city underground; arrangements would be made through the city for those leaving the ghetto for the forest. Second, he announced that the ghetto underground would assume responsibility for contact with the Judenrat. The ghetto leaders were reluctant to give up their developing contact with Captain Bystrov's partisan unit, but they knew that the city underground was in contact with many more partisan units than they were, and that the ghetto needed access to those contacts, so they could not refuse. With respect to the Judenrat, the ghetto leaders argued at first that its members were collaborators and



that therefore the underground should not be in contact with them. Kazinietz responded that members of the Judenrat, unlike members of governmental structures outside the ghetto, had not been free to refuse the positions to which they were appointed; they should be seen in the same way, he said, as the Jews who were forced to work in German factories producing goods for the German military. Moreover, Kazinietz said, in establishing contact with the Judenrat, the ghetto underground had a chance to work with wonderful, dedicated people. He told them that Elye Mushkin, the head of the Judenrat, Hersh Ruditzer, the head of the Labor Exchange and of the workshops in the ghetto, and Zyama Serebriansky, the head of the Jewish Police, were members of the underground and were carrying out its orders.<sup>32</sup>

The ghetto leaders reluctantly agreed to take over this responsibility. In the first meeting between the ghetto underground leaders and Mushkin, it was agreed that every piece of information that any member of the Judenrat obtained about German actions or intentions would be reported to the underground immediately. At this time every member of the Judenrat was connected to the underground. In addition to Mushkin, Ruditzer, and Serebriansky, Boris Dolsky, the head of the Housing Department, Zorov, the head of the ghetto passport office, and Mikhail Zorin, who was in charge of welfare in the ghetto, had strong underground connections. Others were less enthusiastic about the roles into which they had been thrust, and took less initiative in pursuing underground work. Smolar wrote after the war that the original members of the Judenrat “fulfilled our directives, each in his own capacity, some very efficiently and some less so. Almost everyone of them enjoyed our confidence, with the exception of M. Tulski, whose reliability was questioned by our man at the Shirokaya [Street] camp.”<sup>33</sup> None of the original members of the Judenrat board survived the war.<sup>34</sup>

Several weeks before November 7, when the first major pogrom took place in the ghetto, underground members who worked in German police shops reported that they had heard discussions of an impending “reduction” of the ghetto territory.<sup>35</sup> A few days before the pogrom, Zyama Serebriansky, the head of the Jewish Police, reported to the underground that members of the Judenrat had heard that an entire section of the ghetto, on its southeast side, in which approximately 20,000 people lived, was to be “cut off.”<sup>36</sup> Both the Judenrat and the underground assumed that people were to be evicted from this area. But since the news seemed ominous, members of the underground, as well as the Judenrat, circulated the advice that everyone living in that area who could should

either leave the ghetto and stay with friends outside it or find a place to stay in the ghetto, outside the targeted area. Many of those who lived in this area, especially older people, stayed where they were. Others, especially younger people, took the advice and left. On November 20 the Germans returned to the ghetto, explaining that they had not met their quota in the previous pogrom, and emptied another ghetto neighborhood of its residents. The underground probably did not manage to reduce the number of victims, but by its actions it established a reputation for concern about the welfare of the ghetto population.

Throughout the winter of 1941–42, while the Judenrat board consisted of its original members, the ghetto underground and the Judenrat worked together closely. Serebriansky, the head of the Jewish Police, posted police who were members of the underground at the ghetto gates when underground groups were due to leave for the forest. He informed the underground when the Gestapo had plans to raid houses from which people had left for the forest, thus enabling the underground to warn the residents of these houses in time to hide. When Judenrat members learned that the Germans planned to divide the ghetto into two parts, one for skilled workers and their families, the other for the unskilled, they informed the underground. The underground leadership, concluding that the Germans wanted to separate the unskilled from the skilled so as to murder those in the former category, produced and distributed large numbers of false documents showing that the bearer was a skilled worker. The Germans, on discovering that the ghetto population consisted overwhelmingly of skilled workers, abandoned their plan to divide the ghetto.<sup>37</sup>

The urgency of building ties with allies outside the ghetto made the role of liaison particularly important within the ghetto underground. Misha Gebelev, a member of the Committee of Three at the center of the ghetto underground, was appointed in the fall of 1941 as liaison to the network of underground groups in the city. Gebelev had extensive ties to Communists in the city, and even before he became a liaison for the underground, he maintained these contacts through frequent trips to the city. His dark, curly hair and his facial features could have raised suspicions that he was a Jew, but these factors were apparently outweighed by his calm, confident manner, which suggested that he had as much right as anyone else to walk through the streets of Minsk. Gebelev regularly left the ghetto through a hole in the fence on Myasnikova Street, near the Jewish cemetery. Nearby, he hid a workman's jacket and cap and a toolbox, which he took with him when he left the ghetto. After he became a liaison for the underground, he

carried papers, which the underground had prepared for him, identifying him as a Russian named Rusinov. With the help of the city underground he found an apartment in the city, and he organized an underground group in the city to help him with his work there. He spent as much time in the city as in the ghetto. In July 1942 a policeman caught Gebelev leaving the ghetto and arrested him, not as a Jew but as a smuggler who had illegally entered the ghetto. The underground tried to get Gebelev out of prison with a bribe but did not succeed in time. Gebelev was executed, probably in a sweep conducted to make room for new prisoners.<sup>38</sup>

Gebelev was not the ghetto underground's sole liaison. The underground also appointed Chasya Pruslina, a well-known and highly respected member of the Communist Party, the mother of two children, and the sister of Motye Pruslin, a member of the ghetto underground's Committee of Three (see fig. 10). Her husband was in the Red Army in the east; he did not return from the war. As in Gebelev's case, her extensive ties to Communists in the city, and the high regard in which she was held, made her an ideal liaison to the city. Pruslina became an underground liaison after the November 7 pogrom, in which her nine-year-old son was killed, leaving her with her four-year-old daughter, Zinaida, whom she placed in the home of an underground member in the city.<sup>39</sup> After she became a liaison, Pruslina lived with friends in the city underground, outside the ghetto, most of the time. She organized an underground group there and with other members of the city underground produced false documents, which she took to underground members in the ghetto. She also carried underground newspapers and leaflets, as well as other documents and messages, back and forth across the "border" between the ghetto and the city.

At the age of forty-one, Pruslina regarded herself as an old woman. She believed that the stress of the war had added years to her appearance, and she used her identity as an old woman to advantage on the occasions when she was stopped for questioning. Once, when she was crossing the border in an area that was not yet fenced (and where the exact boundary of the ghetto was unclear), a policeman approached her and began to interrogate her. Pruslina was carrying papers with the names and addresses of underground members, and thus, she later wrote, she would have preferred to die on the spot rather than to be arrested and searched. Presenting herself as a Byelorussian woman who lived in the city, she protested that she had not crossed the border but had gone to a water tap on the edge of the ghetto to get water for her family. As she told the story in her memoirs, a number of Byelorussian women gathered around



Figure 10. Chasya Mendeleeвна Pruslina, in 1941. Photograph courtesy of Zinaida Alexeevna Nikodemova.

her and the policeman and loudly voiced their sympathy for her plight. A young, beautiful Byelorussian woman approached the policeman and interrupted his interrogation of Pruslina by saying, “Why are you bothering with that old woman? Come, let’s go get a bite to eat.” The policeman left with the young woman, and Pruslina crossed safely into the city. She was forever grateful, she wrote, to the anonymous Byelorussian women who had saved her.<sup>40</sup>

There were other liaisons to the city underground in addition to Gebelev and Pruslina: Gebelev and Smolar both had their own liaisons, members who took messages and documents across the border. Both Gebelev and Pruslina organized underground groups in the city and served as the heads of these groups. Several underground groups in the ghetto had contacts with groups or individuals in the city and assigned members to serve as liaisons. There were also a number of members of the city underground who regularly visited the ghetto to bring printed materials or to exchange information. These people would attach yellow circles to their clothes and enter the ghetto either through the fence or with working columns as they were led back into the ghetto at the end of the day. In addition to this network of liaisons between the ghetto and the city, the ghetto underground appointed an internal liaison, Emma Radova, twenty-one years old and a Komsomol member. She was also given the responsibility of organizing young people in the ghetto into Komsomol groups, which were attached to the underground. On October 26, 1941, the Germans had hung people in several squares in Minsk. A group of Jewish workers passed through a square where three people had been hung; placards reading “We are partisans, and we shot at German soldiers” had been placed around their necks. One of the group of workers from the ghetto recognized a young woman among the three as Masha Bruskina, a Jewish teenager. News of her death inspired a circle

of Bruskina's former classmates and friends, including Emma Radova, to discuss ways of engaging in resistance. Zhenka, the seventeen year old who had introduced Smolar to Kazinietz, apparently knew Radova and her friends from before the war. He introduced Radova and other members of her circle to the underground leaders in the ghetto.<sup>41</sup>

Emma Radova became the leading internal liaison for the underground. She arranged meetings among underground members and carried messages between them when it was too dangerous for them to meet. She was a born liaison: she maintained good relations with everyone, remembered everything, and repeated only what was necessary, without divulging secrets. She knew the names and addresses of more underground members than did anyone else, and she stayed in the ghetto longer than many, helping to sustain the work of the underground as others in leadership positions left for the forest. After the war, Sarah Levina wrote of Radova: "This 20-year old Komsomol member was the leader of the Communist youth during the horrible years of the occupation. Modest, not talkative, courageous, she did the riskiest things. Her dark, intelligent eyes reflected both determination and sadness."<sup>42</sup> In September 1942 Radova reported that she was being watched by members of the "Special Operations Group," Jewish collaborators whom the Germans had put in charge of the ghetto police after they became aware of the Judenrat's ties to the underground. She was given permission to leave and join a partisan unit. But before she was able to leave the ghetto, Radova was arrested. A member of the Special Operations Group recognized her as she waited at the ghetto gate for underground members returning to the ghetto with working groups. She was put in the Minsk prison and tortured repeatedly, but she never gave the Germans any information. On January 9, 1943, she was executed.

#### THE FORMATION OF THE MINSK UNDERGROUND

In late November or early December 1941, in the wake of the devastating pogroms of that month, a meeting was held in the city for the purpose of forming a Minsk-wide underground organization; Misha Gebelev represented the ghetto underground. The organization that was created was based on neighborhoods: the ghetto was counted as one neighborhood among five. The organizational structure was based on units of five to ten people (in the ghetto and for a time in the city as well, the term "desyatka," or unit of ten, was used), each with a leader who would remain in touch with a neighborhood committee; each neighborhood committee

was represented on the underground center, the City Committee, which was to govern the underground as a whole. Kazinietz was made secretary of this underground center. Misha Gebelev was appointed as representative from the ghetto underground, and others were appointed from the various neighborhoods of the city. The structure of the underground as a whole paralleled the very similar structure that had already been adopted by the ghetto underground.

This structure was intended to streamline the transmission of orders from higher to lower levels, and to protect the identity of underground members by keeping the number of members who knew the names of others to a minimum. Neither the principle of hierarchy nor that of secrecy embodied in this structure worked out as had been envisioned. Many underground members were acquainted with one another, and especially outside the ghetto secrecy was often not taken very seriously. The conditions of wartime resistance often forced *desyatkas*, and other underground networks, to initiate activities on their own. Each of the three major projects that the underground organizations in the ghetto and in the city participated in jointly came originally from rank-and-file initiatives, and then were endorsed and supported from above by the City Committee. These were important projects, and they were carried out well, but the process did not entirely correspond to the Soviet conception of top-down decision making.

The three joint projects included establishing an underground printing press and distributing the literature that it produced, rescuing children from the ghetto, and sending volunteers and supplies to partisan units in the forests. The effort to establish a printing press was initiated by Byelorussian prisoners of war who were looking for connections to an underground movement, in cooperation with Jewish printers who belonged to one of the secret groups in the ghetto. The City Committee endorsed this project and helped find resources for its realization. The effort to rescue children from the ghetto was initiated by several women members of the underground, inside and outside the ghetto. The City Committee similarly endorsed and supported this project. The secret groups in the ghetto had from their inception expressed the intention of sending volunteers to the forest. Without the efforts of the leadership of the ghetto underground, and the City Committee, these efforts might not have been feasible and certainly would have been accomplished on a much more limited scale.

It is to the credit of the leaders of the underground that they supported initiatives coming from below. In the accounts of the underground that

he wrote after the war, Smolar often failed to mention who had initiated underground activities, and he often gave credit instead to a “we” in which he seemed to include himself and other leaders of the ghetto underground. Such an approach corresponded to Soviet assumptions about the role of leadership. But some other survivors of the war have complained that Smolar tended to take too much credit for himself, or to leave out the names of those who deserved credit.<sup>43</sup> Insofar as possible I have checked Smolar’s accounts of events against other accounts.

The committee established to oversee the Minsk underground was officially called the Second (or Auxiliary) City Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party. The word “supplementary” (or “second”) was attached to the name of the City Committee as a gesture of subordination to the first, or legitimate, underground committee, which most of those at the meeting were sure existed somewhere in the city. “Westerners,” Smolar and others, had pressed for the formation of an underground organization and had scoffed at what they regarded as the timidity of Byelorussian Communists, Jews and non-Jews, in hesitating to form one. But the Byelorussians had reasons for their concerns. They wanted to work with the legitimate, Communist-appointed underground committee that they assumed would soon reveal itself, rather than appearing to have set themselves against it. They were confident that the Red Army would return soon and drive the Germans out, and they were aware that when the Soviets returned, serious consequences could follow from any action that appeared to have been taken in disregard of Soviet authority. But their hesitations about violating Soviet protocol were not simply the result of fear: they supported the Soviet concept of authority and were distressed to find themselves in a situation that placed them inadvertently at odds with it. They wanted to emphasize their loyalty to the Soviet Union and to the Soviet Communist Party.

As it turned out, the Byelorussian underground leaders were right to have been concerned about appearing to disregard Soviet authority. But they were wrong in several other regards. First, the “legitimate” underground committee never appeared, because it did not exist; the fleeing Communist leaders had left no such committee behind. Second, the occupation lasted much longer than the leaders of the underground or probably anyone else anticipated in the first months of the war. The term “supplementary” eventually fell out of use; the governing body of the Minsk underground came to be called, simply, the City Committee. Finally, when Soviet power returned to Byelorussia, first during the

war, in the form of the Soviet Partisan Movement, which extended its influence over previously independent partisan units, and later, at the point of liberation, the fact that the underground had appended the term “supplementary” to its name was of little assistance. But the story of the confrontation between the Minsk underground and the Soviet authorities belongs at the end of this book, after ghetto resistance to the Nazis, and the ties between the ghetto and its allies in the city and the forest, are described.

#### THE GHETTO, THE CITY, AND THE FOREST

The ghetto underground had joined in the formation of a Minsk-wide underground for both ideological and practical reasons. From a Communist perspective, it would have been unthinkable for the ghetto underground to maintain a separate existence when it was possible to join forces with a Byelorussian underground in the city. A unified underground would be able to do more to undermine German power than two separate organizations could do. Furthermore, the main aim of the ghetto underground was to send as many Jews to the forest as possible, and the city underground was in a much better position than the ghetto underground to establish wide contacts with partisan units in the Minsk region. The ghetto underground needed the access to these partisan units that the city underground could provide. The city underground was likewise in a much better position than the ghetto underground to discover routes into the forest that made it possible to bypass German checkpoints. The ghetto underground needed the forest guides that the city could provide. The urgent need to send Jews to the forest was both a basis for the ghetto underground’s alliance with the city underground and a source of tensions between the two organizations. In light of the escalating German pogroms in the ghetto, the underground’s failure to consistently place Jews in the first ranks of those to be sent to the forest could seem coldhearted. But the leaders of the ghetto underground agreed with the City Committee that the highest priority for the underground must be the partisan movement’s military effectiveness.<sup>44</sup>

The ghetto played an important role within the Minsk underground as a whole by sending substantial material aid to the partisans. The Germans demanded that the Judenrat collect “contributions” of money, jewelry, and furs from the ghetto population. The Judenrat, under Mushkin, diverted as much of this as possible to the partisans. Underground members



and others in the ghetto hoarded medicines, stole weapons, collected and produced warm clothes, and sent them to partisan units. Some contributions were also sent from the city, but most people in the city felt less urgency than people in the ghetto, who, in many cases, desperately wanted to establish a link with the partisans or at least lend support to their efforts in the hope that they would prevail. People in the city, including the many who hoped for a quick Soviet victory, no doubt believed that if they managed to keep their heads down, they could survive the occupation. In the ghetto, many people, especially underground members but also many others, were willing to make considerable sacrifices to help the partisans. The ghetto's material contributions to the partisans were no doubt important in securing the relationship between the Minsk underground as a whole and the partisan movement in the Minsk region, especially during the first year of the war, when many partisan units were ill equipped and more interested in acquiring necessities than in gaining new members.

The ghetto's alliance with the city was indispensable, but it was also in some respects disappointing. The ghetto underground had hoped to send not just thousands, but tens of thousands of Jews out of the ghetto, including not only those able to fight, but also noncombatants—children, old people, and women—who were not prepared to fight. The City Committee did its best to accommodate the ghetto underground's requests for support in sending groups to the forest, and for places for Jews in the groups sent from the city. But the City Committee never sent anywhere near as many Jews as the ghetto underground would have liked. Nor could it have, due to the minority status of the ghetto underground on the City Committee, and the priority, supported by the underground as a whole, of sending prisoners of war. The number of Jews sent to the forest was also limited, at first by the partisan requirement that volunteers bring weapons (a requirement that was gradually relaxed over the course of the war), and throughout by the ghetto underground's fear of inadvertently including someone who might turn out to be a German agent. The ghetto underground was willing to include in the groups that it sent to the forest only people who were well known to underground members and/or were able to pass rigorous scrutiny. Underground members Nina Liss and Rosa Lipskaya left the ghetto, separately, in search of places in the Byelorussian countryside where there was no German presence, to which children, old people, and women not prepared to fight might be sent.<sup>45</sup> No such place was ever found.

Though the leaders of the ghetto underground, first Gebelev, and then Smolar, found it necessary to maintain pressure on the City Committee to

send more Jews to the forest, they regarded Kazinietz and the committee as a whole as sensitive to the needs of the ghetto. After the war Smolar expressed his appreciation of the City Committee's responsiveness to the ghetto's demands. "From the beginning to the failure [of March 1942] we had the best relations with the City Committee," he said. "There was a sensitive, brotherly attitude on the part of Slavek [Kazinietz] and the others toward the needs of the ghetto, toward our cry of woe, open the gates! Let us send more people from the ghetto! This went so far that Slavek himself led groups of Jews to the forest."<sup>46</sup> Though the ghetto leaders came to believe that the ghetto must form its own partisan bases, they were willing to take great risks to help keep a leading body of the Minsk underground as a whole in existence. The City Committee was nearly destroyed in a wave of arrests described below. Misha Gebelev, one of the few surviving members of that committee, participated in the effort to form a new one, despite the great likelihood that its members would suffer the same fate.

## TWO UNDERGROUND FAILURES

The first City Committee was destroyed in late March and early April 1942 in a wave of arrests that began with the arrest of the Military Council, a group of military officers within the Minsk underground. Some of them, under interrogation, gave the Germans names, which led to the arrests of widening circles within the underground, including many members of the City Committee. Misha Gebelev, the ghetto's representative to the City Committee, escaped arrest, and in May 1942 he and other surviving members of what now came to be called the First City Committee came together to form a Second City Committee, headed by Ivan Kovalyov. The Second City Committee functioned until September 25, 1942, when it too succumbed to a "failure," and a second wave of arrests took place. This time, all the members of the committee were arrested. After the second failure no new underground center was created in Minsk. Underground activity continued: many underground groups continued to function independently, partisans periodically came into the city and engaged in sabotage, and growing numbers of Minsk residents left the city to join partisan units. In September 1943 P. K. Ponomarenko, Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party and head of the Soviet Partisan Movement, with its headquarters in Moscow, appointed members of a Third Minsk City Committee. But this committee was located in the forest, and none of its members visited Minsk before

the end of the war. By this time all surviving members of the ghetto underground had joined partisan units in the forest, and the ghetto was on the verge of annihilation. With the collapse of the Second City Committee, there was no longer an underground center in Minsk; remaining underground groups in the city had connections with partisan units. The Third, or "Forest," Minsk City Committee, was formed outside the city, by the Soviet authorities. Its members did not visit the city during the war, and it had little impact on underground activity in the city.

The first failure was set off by the arrest of the Military Council, which had been organized in Minsk in September 1941, approximately two months before the establishment of the City Committee. The ghetto underground leadership (or at least Smolar, who survived to write an account of its history) was unaware of the existence of the Military Council until sometime in the winter of 1941-42, when Gebelev reported to the ghetto underground that the power to form groups to be sent to the partisans had been passed from the City Committee to the Military Council, an organization of former Red Army officers that had for some time functioned as a parallel authority to the City Committee within the underground.<sup>47</sup> The ghetto leadership had asked that more Jews be included in the groups being sent to the forest. Kazinietz responded in a note to the ghetto leadership that the Military Council had decided not to send any more Jews to the forest because priority must be given to prisoners of war, trained officers, and soldiers, and also because Jews were likely to be recognized as such in the countryside, and this could draw the attention of the Germans to partisan units.<sup>48</sup> The Military Council included a few Jews; the council had made one of its Jewish members, Nikolai Mikhailovich Nikitin, the head of a partisan unit. But Nikitin was a former Red Army officer, and from the point of view of the Military Council sending untrained Jews from the ghetto to the forest was a different matter. The ghetto underground protested this decision as anti-Semitic and therefore anti-Soviet; the City Committee, Smolar wrote, supported this complaint.<sup>49</sup> German intelligence confirmed the suspicions of the ghetto underground leadership, noting that the Military Council gave wrong directions to some groups leaving from the ghetto, causing them to wander in the forest until they encountered Germans or police and were captured or killed.<sup>50</sup> The ghetto underground's protest succeeded. The Military Council relented, and Jews were again included in groups leaving for the forest from the city. But on March 2, 1942, a major pogrom in the ghetto made clear the urgency of accelerating efforts to send Jews out of the ghetto. With the approval

of the City Committee, the ghetto underground began sending groups to the forest with the intention of establishing direct contact with partisan units.

In late March 1942, the ghetto underground was able to establish such contacts, the Military Council ceased to exist, and with it, the First Minsk City Committee. On March 25, 1942, German soldiers surrounded a house in the Russian district where the leadership of the Military Council was meeting, and everyone was arrested. Under interrogation some of those arrested testified against other underground members, and a wave of arrests ensued, mostly in the city, because the Military Council's contacts with the ghetto underground had been quite limited. A prisoner of war who worked at the prison was able to warn the City Committee, and messengers were sent to warn underground members to hide, but many failed to avoid arrest. Gebelev left the ghetto to find Kazinietz and offer him a place to hide in the ghetto, but Kazinietz, accompanied by Lola Revinskaya, went instead to a previously arranged meeting with a liaison from a partisan unit, where the two were met by a Gestapo agent and were arrested. Over the following weeks the Germans executed 251 members of the underground and held 126 more in prison. On May 9 the Germans hung 28 members of the underground in squares in the city, including the members of the City Committee and Lola Revinskaya, and Judenrat members Ruditser and Serebriansky.<sup>51</sup>

It is not known how the Germans learned of the location of the Military Council meeting. But there were two routes through which information about the underground might have reached the Germans. First, both the Germans and the underground were actively recruiting prisoners of war (and, in the case of the Germans, capturing prisoners of war with ties to the underground). In the early fall of 1941, Olga Sherbatsevich, a nurse at a prisoner-of-war hospital in Minsk, had helped many prisoners of war to escape the hospital and had organized groups of prisoners of war and others and sent them to partisan units in the forest. One of those whom Sherbatsevich helped to escape was Boris Rudzianko. He and Sherbatsevich's son Volodya were captured on their way to the forest by a German patrol, and Rudzianko betrayed Sherbatsevich to the Germans. On October 26 Olga Sherbatsevich and her family, along with other underground members, were hanged in Minsk. According to German sources, Rudzianko also revealed plans for a prisoner-of-war uprising, to take place January 4, 1942. Prisoners of war, along with supporters in the city, were to gain control of the airport, join with partisans who would have surrounded the city, and, 10,000 strong, break through

the front and proceed to the Russian east.<sup>52</sup> In the days before the planned uprising, the Germans arrested and killed hundreds of prisoners of war. Rudzianko had no doubt been sincere when he presented himself to Sherbatsevich as a former Red Army officer who wanted to go to the partisans. But when the Germans captured him, he decided to become an informer. He returned to Minsk and continued to work in the underground. During the war he was not suspected, because the groups that he sent to the forest always arrived safely. But other groups, which he knew of but was not responsible for, were often captured. After the war this pattern was noticed, and he was arrested.<sup>53</sup> The Germans actively recruited prisoners of war as spies; Rudzianko was probably not their only source of information about the underground.

The Germans may also have gained information about the underground more directly, from within the underground itself. In the city underground especially there were some who did not observe the "rules of conspiracy" scrupulously. This was less the case in the ghetto, where the consequences of leaks were all too obvious. For two decades, the Byelorussian Communist Party had been not only entirely public, but the center of officially endorsed political activity. Few members of the Byelorussian Communist Party at the time of the war had any experience of underground activity, and some thought that it was beneath them to hide their involvement in opposition. The Military Council in particular was known within the underground for its cavalier attitude toward the "rules of conspiracy." Some members of the Council insisted on privileges like those that they had enjoyed in the Red Army, such as the assistance of secretaries. Members of the underground who survived the March arrests suspected that the secretary of one Military Council member, who knew where and when council meetings were to be held, was a German agent.<sup>54</sup>

The Second City Committee, founded in May 1942, collapsed in a wave of arrests that began five months later, on September 25. Again some of those arrested broke under interrogation and gave the Germans information. This time the secretary of the committee, Kovalyov, may have collaborated with the Germans. There were reports that German officers took him to a factory in Minsk where he gave a speech in which he argued that the Soviets could not win the war, and urged those in his audience to support the Germans.<sup>55</sup> All the members of the Second City Committee were arrested, as well as the secretaries of the various neighborhood committees. Arrests of underground members took place all over the city.<sup>56</sup> Many underground members escaped by fleeing to the forest

and joining partisan units. After this, no new City Committee was established in Minsk. Despite the destruction of the underground center in Minsk, resistance in the city continued to grow. As it became clear that the Soviets were winning the war, German violence toward Byelorussians escalated, increasing numbers of Minsk residents fled to the partisans,<sup>57</sup> and acts of sabotage in the city increased. But in contrast to the first stages of the war, when partisan units in the Minsk region had depended upon help from the city (and the ghetto), the partisans were now promoting resistance in the city and in some cases driving into the city to conduct acts of sabotage, and then returning to the forest.

The cause of the September 1942 failure was never determined. Many underground members who managed to escape arrest later laid the blame on Kovalyov. Other arrested members of the Second City Committee were also blamed. Some thought that Kovalyov and/or others had begun to cooperate with the Germans after they were arrested, while others expressed suspicions that some of those arrested might have become collaborators even before their arrests. The official Soviet view, that anyone who broke under torture was a traitor, tended to erase the distinction between forced and unforced collaboration, and encouraged suspicions that those who collaborated after arrest had been doing so earlier as well. But the cause of the second failure may well have lain outside the Second City Committee. The problems that had probably led to the first failure, five months earlier, had continued to exist. Both the underground and the Germans had continued to recruit prisoners of war. The Germans had no doubt continued to receive information on the underground from prisoners of war recruited earlier in the war. The Second City Committee had decided not to reestablish the Military Council, or any other underground institution independent of its authority, in the belief that through unilateral control over the Minsk underground it could tighten security. But some members of the city underground apparently continued to disregard the "rules of conspiracy." In the wake of the September failure, an agent of the Soviet Partisan Movement, who had been sent to Minsk to make contact with the underground, reported that the rules of conspiracy were widely violated in the Minsk underground. He believed that Kovalyov and others, once arrested, had begun giving the Germans information, but argued that the basic problem was that too many people in the Minsk underground knew too much. Too many underground members, he wrote, including the members of the City Committee, knew the names and addresses of too many other members; too many people knew the

addresses of underground apartments; too many people attended underground meetings.<sup>58</sup>

#### REPRESSION IN THE GHETTO

German repression of underground activity followed a somewhat different trajectory in the ghetto than it did outside it. A few members of the ghetto underground were arrested in late March or early April 1942, but mass arrests did not take place in the ghetto. By late September, when the city underground suffered its second failure, almost all the members of the ghetto underground who had survived to that point had left for the forest, and the ghetto population had been reduced to around 2,000. In the city, the waves of underground arrests stood out as dramatic instances of German brutality; in the ghetto, they were overshadowed by successive pogroms. The underground failures nevertheless had an impact on the ghetto underground. The March arrests made its work more difficult by weakening its ties to the Judenrat and by temporarily cutting off its ties to the city underground, and therefore to the partisan units with which the city underground had contacts. In the wake of the arrests the ghetto underground increased its efforts to establish ties with partisan units, and also to create its own bases and to initiate the formation of partisan units, which could be counted on to accept Jews from the ghetto.

The ghetto underground's network of alliances, inside and outside the ghetto, functioned most smoothly during the winter of 1941-42, but then began to fray under the impact of German attacks. Sometime in February 1942, Ilya Mushkin had been ordered to the German administrative building in Minsk; he never reappeared. It was rumored in the ghetto that in the weeks before he was arrested Mushkin had been hiding a German officer, who refused to take part in the war, in his house. The officer, it was said, had left the ghetto with false papers and civilian clothes. Underground members speculated that the officer might have been captured and given information about Mushkin.<sup>59</sup> The fact that only Mushkin was arrested, and not the other underground members of the Judenrat, suggested that this, rather than Mushkin's underground activity, was the cause of his arrest. Mushkin's arrest sent a chill through the ghetto, because he was widely regarded as a principled man who did his best to protect ghetto Jews from the Germans.<sup>60</sup>

On March 2, 1942, the Germans conducted their third major pogrom in the ghetto. As on November 7, the anniversary of the October

Revolution, the Germans chose a holiday widely celebrated by Byelorussian Jews to perpetrate a massacre: the Jewish holiday of Purim, which celebrates the defeat of Haman and his plot to kill the Jews throughout the Persian Empire, fell on that day. As in the case of the November 7 pogrom, the Judenrat and the underground had advance warning, and this time they had a clearer idea of what was going to happen. Toward the end of February Hersch Ruditser and Zyama Serebriensky, now, with the loss of Mushkin, the two Judenrat members with the closest ties to the underground, reported to the underground leaders in the ghetto that the Germans had ordered the Judenrat to assemble 5,000 Jews for a special work assignment on the morning of March 2, and that the number must not include any specialized workers. In order to test the Germans' intentions, Boris Dolsky, the head of the Housing Department, asked if children and old people could be included. The response, that it didn't matter who the 5,000 were, convinced the Judenrat board that the Germans planned to conduct a pogrom.<sup>61</sup>

In the discussion that ensued, the Judenrat board agreed not to comply with this order. The Judenrat worked with the underground to warn the ghetto population to leave the ghetto if possible, and if not, to hide. A malina large enough for several hundred people was constructed at the workshops overseen by the Judenrat, and a concealed tunnel was dug under the fence to make it possible for people to leave the ghetto. On the morning of March 2, after the columns of workers had left the ghetto, Einsatzkommandos and Lithuanian and Byelorussian police entered the ghetto and seized anyone they could find on the streets. Thousands were taken to a pit just outside the ghetto and shot. Apparently because the Germans had not managed to capture the 5,000 they had demanded of the Judenrat, work groups returning to the ghetto in the evening were stopped outside the gate, made to kneel in the snow, and many were shot.<sup>62</sup> The Purim pogrom underscored the urgency of sending Jews to the forest. Underground members, and other Jews as well, were certain that other pogroms would follow, and growing numbers began fleeing the ghetto without the help of the underground, despite the dangers involved in doing so. It was at this time that the underground asked for permission to establish its own bases in the forest, was told that the Military Council had turned down its request, and then was given permission by the City Committee to go ahead with its plans.

During the course of the first underground failure, German officers came to the ghetto in pursuit of four leaders of the ghetto underground: Misha Gebelev, Nahum Feldman, Zyama Okun, and Hersch Smolar.



Misha Gebelev and Nahum Feldman managed to hide. The Germans found four ghetto residents with Feldman's name, shot all of them, and apparently believed that they had achieved their aim. Soon afterwards, on April 12, Feldman left for the forest with a group from the ghetto. Zyama Okun was captured on the streets of the ghetto, on his way from one hiding place to another, and shot.

Hersh Smolar was in hiding. Some time earlier a Judenrat member whom he did not trust had come to visit him in the boiler room, and Smolar had promptly moved to another hiding place, elsewhere in the ghetto. During the night of March 31 he had heard shooting; the next morning he left his hiding place to see what had happened, and found himself included in a group of men rounded up from the ghetto street by Police Superintendent Richter, the main German authority over the ghetto. Along with the other men, Smolar was led to a house that included the apartment of underground member Nina Liss and her family. Several days earlier, Liss had returned from a trip to western Byelorussia, where she had searched without success for a place to which women and children might be sent from the ghetto. The bodies of Nina, her family, and others lay in front of the house, on the stairs up to her apartment, and in the apartment itself. Smolar, whom Richter had apparently not recognized, and the other men who had been rounded up from the street were ordered to take the bodies to the cemetery and bury them.

Hersh Ruditzer, Judenrat member and head of the Labor Exchange, suddenly appeared at the scene and pulled Smolar out of the group and into a side street. The night before, he said, the Gestapo had raided Liss's apartment. An underground member who managed to escape had reported that they had come looking for Smolar, and Liss, who knew where Smolar was hiding, had refused to tell them. The Gestapo, Ruditzer said, had come to the Judenrat office in the morning and had given the Judenrat board until noon to produce Smolar, threatening to kill all the members of the Judenrat board if he were not handed over. Smolar asked Ruditzer to send Dr. Kulik a message asking him to hospitalize Smolar immediately. Ruditzer did this. Dr. Kulik sent a stretcher on which Smolar was placed, wrapped up as if he were ill with typhus (and thus with his face covered). Smolar was taken to the contagious diseases ward of the hospital. Later several underground members came to pay a visit to their sick friend in the hospital and explained what had happened. After the Gestapo demanded that the Judenrat turn Smolar over, they had left, and the Judenrat board had considered what to do. Some were ready to consider turning Smolar in. But Moishe Yoffe, who had

replaced Mushkin as chairman, proposed that they take a page from the biblical story of the binding of Joseph and that they emulate Joseph's brothers, who, before selling Joseph into slavery in Egypt, had dipped his coat into the blood of a kid. The brothers had sent the coat to Jacob, Joseph's and their father, to prove that a wild animal had killed Joseph. Yoffe obtained a blank passport from the passport office, filled it out with Smolar's name, took it to the cemetery, and smeared it with the blood of a recent victim of German violence. Yoffe then took the passport to the Gestapo officers, saying that clearly Smolar was already dead; his passport had been found on a body in the cemetery. The Gestapo officers, satisfied, left the ghetto before their noon deadline.<sup>63</sup>

Smolar remained in the hospital, in hiding, until he left the ghetto in August 1942, four months later. For some time he remained in the contagious diseases ward, but eventually a nurse who belonged to the underground, and who often kept watch at the door to the hospital, reported that the hospital seemed to be under German surveillance, and Smolar was moved to the attic, where a malina was built for him. A brick wall was built next to an existing brick chimney in such a way as to appear to be part of its base. The space created by this extension was only large enough to stand in, but it included a window through which Smolar could look down on the ghetto streets. Every day Yadviga Spirer, a nurse and member of the underground, visited Smolar, bringing him food and also messages from the underground; sometimes Emma Radova visited also; sometimes Spirer relayed Smolar's responses to Radova. In this way Smolar was kept in touch with the underground.

The March events alerted the Germans to the fact that there were Judenrat members with underground connections, and the composition of the Judenrat board began to change. Hersh Ruditser and Zyama Serebriansky were arrested. The Germans made new appointments to the Judenrat, including several Polish Jews, refugees from Warsaw and Lodz, who were not restrained either by connections to the Minsk Jewish community or by their consciences, and whom the Germans correctly judged to be willing collaborators. Nahum Epstein (from Lodz) and Chaim Rosenblatt (from Warsaw) were placed on the Judenrat, in positions of considerable power. Rosenblatt was made head of a Special Operations Group that was ostensibly within the Jewish Police but actually, due to Rosenblatt and his colleagues' close connections to the Germans, soon gained control over it. Rosenblatt was assisted by another Warsaw refugee, Weinstein, whose first name we do not know. Epstein was put in charge of the Labor Exchange. From this position he was able to dom-

inate the Judenrat; Rosenblatt took orders from him.<sup>64</sup> Ghetto rumors associated Rosenblatt and Weinstein with the Warsaw underworld. Sarah Levina, a member of the underground who worked as Epstein's secretary, wrote that when he lived in Warsaw he had been a member of Betar, a right-wing Zionist organization with a military style. This, she believed, was the source of Epstein's hatred of Communists and of Soviet Jews.<sup>65</sup> The Judenrat now became something of a battleground between collaborators and those aligned with the underground. Those connected to the underground could no longer speak openly; any slip could lead to arrest. Subsequently Dolsky was betrayed to the Germans, and Zorov was killed. Both of them had continued to work with the underground.<sup>66</sup>

Moishe Yoffe, now chair of the Judenrat, followed Mushkin's example and remained in touch with the underground, but because there were now collaborators on the board, he did so much more circumspectly than Mushkin had done. Members of the underground working in the offices of the Judenrat managed to continue oppositional work despite the heightened dangers. Within the Labor Exchange, two underground members, Mira Strongina and Rosa Altman, continued to assign other underground members to jobs in the city where they could engage in sabotage.<sup>67</sup> Strongina worked in the office of the ghetto police, along with Sarah Levina; the two were sometimes able to warn the intended victims of police raids. When Sarah Goland, an underground member who played a major role in organizing groups sent to the forest, was arrested on suspicion of underground activity, Sarah Levina managed to get her released by pointing out to Epstein that Goland was the mother of two small children. It was inconceivable, Levina argued, that the mother of small children would take the risk of joining the underground. Soon after this Goland left for the forest, with the last group that she organized, taking her children with her. All three survived the war.<sup>68</sup>

#### THE ESCAPE FROM THE GHETTO TO THE FOREST

In the wake of the Purim pogrom of March 2, 1942, the number of Jews urgently wanting to go to the forest and join partisan units rose sharply, and the underground felt pressure to lead more groups out of the ghetto. But the ghetto had lost touch with the partisan groups that it had been in contact with in the fall of 1941, and it had yet to develop new connections. Groups from the ghetto had continued to go to Bystrov's unit, south of Minsk, until the unit moved eastward, and contact was lost.<sup>69</sup>

The City Committee had developed contacts with an expanding number of partisan units and during this period sent groups including Jews as well as Byelorussians to units elsewhere, though primarily to the south and east. But by early March, when a sense that it was urgent to go to the forest rose inside the ghetto, Bystrov's unit had left for the east, losing its connection with Minsk. When, later that month, the City Committee was destroyed, the route through which the ghetto had been sending Jews to the forest was closed.

The ghetto underground began sending groups to the forest on its own, in an effort to reestablish and expand its connections with partisan units, and to establish its own bases. During April 1942 one group, under the leadership of Israel Lapidus, left the ghetto for the Slutsk region, southwest of Minsk, where it established a unit that later merged with an existing Byelorussian unit. Another group, under the leadership of Nahum Feldman, went toward the west with the intention of joining an existing unit, but was refused. Feldman's group joined an existing but leaderless group of Byelorussian partisans in the Staroselsky Forest, named for the nearby village of Staroye Selo, or "Old Village," and formed a base there, about twenty kilometers west of the ghetto.

In June 1942 Tanya Lifshitz, a young woman from the ghetto who had become a partisan liaison, was sent to the ghetto by Feldman to ask that a commander be sent to lead the new unit. Sonya Kurlandskaya, an underground member who worked in the Shirokaya camp, in the Russian district, had been looking for men among the prisoners of war in the camp who might serve as partisan leaders, and had noticed Semyon Ganzenko, a former first lieutenant of the Red Army. She proposed that Ganzenko and several other prisoners of war be taken to the forest. Several other members of the underground also worked in the camp, doing menial tasks such as removing the garbage. Misha Gebelev, Sonya Kurlandskaya, and Tanya Lifshitz met and worked out a plan. On the day that garbage was to be removed from the camp, the underground members on the garbage detail put Ganzenko and the other prisoners of war into barrels of garbage, giving them straws to breathe through, put the barrels on the back of a truck, and drove out of the camp. They stopped at a prearranged place on the outskirts of Minsk where Tanya Lifshitz was waiting, and she led them to the forest. Ganzenko was made commander of the new unit. He came to be known in the partisan movement as both a decent man and a friend of the Jews. Jews from the Minsk ghetto rose in the ranks of his unit and, when his unit became a brigade, in the other units included in it as well.<sup>70</sup>

The Staroselsky Forest became a magnet for Jews fleeing the ghetto, because of its proximity, the presence there of Jewish partisans, including some in leadership positions, and because it was easier to flee to the west from the ghetto than in other directions. While those fleeing the ghetto in this direction had to traverse the city streets between the ghetto and the edge of the forest, this area was less heavily guarded than the Svisloch River and the heart of the city on both sides of it, east and south of the ghetto. Between Ganzenko's sympathies for Jews and the growing numbers of Jewish partisans in this area, Jews fleeing the ghetto, especially those who were unarmed, had a better chance of admission to units in the area west of Minsk than elsewhere. Many of the forest guides taken on and trained by these units were Jews from the ghetto, in many cases children and teenagers. Jews in the ghetto, including members of the underground and increasing numbers of nonmembers, continued to flee in all directions, but those who fled toward the west probably had the best chance of reaching their goal. Over the following year and a half, from the late spring of 1942 until the destruction of the ghetto on October 22, 1943, the influence of the ghetto underground continued to grow among partisan units in this area. By the spring of 1943, Jewish liaisons, mostly children and teenagers, were being sent from partisan units in this area to the ghetto to bring Jews out.

On the morning of July 28, 1942, after the working columns had left the ghetto, a pogrom began; it lasted four days and led to more deaths than any previous pogrom in the Minsk ghetto. The ghetto police, now under the direction of Epstein and Weinstein, assisted the Germans and their assistants, local police and Lithuanians, in rounding people up on the streets and driving them toward Jubilee Square. Moishe Yoffe, the head of the Judenrat, was ordered to address the crowd and reassure them that they were only being taken to work; instead he urged them to flee. Panic ensued, the troops began shooting, and Yoffe was taken to a side street and shot.<sup>71</sup> During this pogrom the Germans entered the Jewish Hospital. They avoided the infectious diseases ward but killed all the patients and medical staff on the surgical floor, including Dr. Kulik. The remaining members of the Judenrat, other than Epstein and Weinstein, were taken out of the Judenrat building and shot. The survivors of this pogrom included Jews working outside the ghetto, who were kept out of the ghetto for the duration of the pogrom, and those who managed to hide. Estimates of the numbers of people killed during this pogrom range from 18,000 to 30,000.<sup>72</sup> After the July pogrom there were approximately 12,000 Jews left alive in the ghetto.<sup>73</sup>

After the pogrom was over, a member of the city underground, Maria Gorokhova, entered the ghetto with one of the first returning groups of working Jews. Gorokhova had instructions from the city underground to find out how the ghetto underground had survived the pogrom, and to take Smolar out of the ghetto to the city. Gorokhova found Emma Radova, the two women went to Smolar's hiding place, and Smolar and Gorokhova left the ghetto the next morning with one of the working groups. After hiding in Gorokhova's apartment for more than a month Smolar was transferred to the home of Nazari Gerasimenko, a leader of the city underground. While Smolar was at Gerasimenko's apartment he met with Ivan Kovalyov, the secretary of the Second City Committee, who told him that the underground planned to send 5,000 people out of Minsk to the forest, to the twenty units with which the committee was in contact. Kovalyov promised that many Jews from the ghetto would be included in this number. Smolar sent word to the leading committee in the ghetto to prepare to send as many Jews as possible to the forest.

But before this mass flight to the forest could be arranged, the second failure took place: a wave of arrests destroyed the City Committee, this time permanently; many underground members were also captured. During the night of September 25, the Gestapo broke into the Gerasimenkos' apartment. Smolar, in his underwear, crawled out a window and lay on a tin roof between two windows while Nazari, his wife, Tatiana, and their twelve-year-old daughter, Lucia, were arrested and taken away. All three were taken to Trostiniets, the death camp outside Minsk, and murdered. When the Gestapo had left, Smolar reentered the apartment, dressed, left, and went back to the ghetto, where he hid until leaving for the forest with four other underground members. They went westward, toward the Koydanov region, and were eventually accepted into an existing brigade as the core of a new unit. Soon after, 25 more Jews arrived from the Minsk ghetto and were made the core of another new unit. Within two months, the two units had grown to 200 people, mostly Jews.<sup>74</sup> Other Jews from the ghetto underground were already in other units in the forests in this region, which stretched from Dzerzhinsk, southwest of Minsk, to Zaslavl, to its northwest. The Staroselsky Forest, where Ganzenko's unit was located, was in the middle of this region; the unit that Smolar joined was farther south. The ghetto underground ultimately formed, or participated in the formation of, eight units, most of them in this area, but none of them remained entirely Jewish; Byelorussians and others joined these units, and Jews eventually constituted a minority. Jews, as well as members of other ethnic groups, rose

to positions of leadership in these partisan units. In part out of a common concern with getting more Jews out of the ghetto, Jews who attained leadership positions in partisan units, many of them former members of the ghetto underground, began to establish contact with each other. A Jewish presence in the partisan movement began to take shape in the region west of Minsk.

After the July pogrom the numbers of those fleeing the ghetto to the forest increased sharply. During the fall of 1942 the underground accelerated its efforts to organize groups and send them out of the ghetto, and increasing numbers of people who did not belong to the underground fled as well, usually in groups; both kinds of flight, “organized” and “private,” in the terminology used by the underground, continued during the winter and spring of 1943. Most if not all of the groups that were organized by the underground were able to take weapons. Some of those who left on their own had managed to gather weapons, which they took with them, and some left without arms, hoping that they would nevertheless be accepted into partisan units. Some partisan units were willing to accept unarmed volunteers, because by this time the Red Army was supplying them with weapons. Partisan units were less willing to accept women than men, so the groups that the underground sent from the ghetto tended to consist mostly of men. As a result, women underground members tended to stay in the ghetto longer than men; some were sent to the forest only after it had become clear that they were in danger of capture by the Germans. Emma Radova, as recounted earlier, asked for permission to leave the ghetto because she was under surveillance by the Special Operations Group. She was given permission but was arrested before she was able to leave, and was tortured repeatedly in the Minsk prison. She died on January 9, 1943, having given the Germans no information.<sup>75</sup>

As the ghetto underground, especially its men, left for the forest, women played an increasingly large role in leadership within the ghetto. After Smolar left the ghetto for the city and then the forest, David Kissel became the head of the ghetto underground, and its Committee of Three consisted of Kissel, Nadya Shusser, and Samuel Kazhdan. Kazhdan was arrested and killed, and in November 1942 Kissel left for the forest in a group that also included his wife, Esfir. Rosa Lipskaya, Nadya Shusser, and Emma Radova remained in the ghetto to supervise the work of the underground.<sup>76</sup> Rosa Lipskaya and her underground group continued to steal weapons from a German arms workshop where several of them worked, and Sarah Goland, Rosa Lipskaya, Nadya Shusser, and Sarah Levina organized groups to leave for the forest, first through contact

with Smolar, while he was in hiding in the city, and in contact with the city underground, and, after he left for the forest, through contact with partisan units maintained by liaisons who regularly visited the ghetto. All the underground members who remained in the ghetto were eventually given permission by the partisan units with which they were in contact to leave the ghetto for the forest.<sup>77</sup> Rosa Lipskaya also supervised sabotage activity conducted by members of her group in a German arms workshop. In July of 1943, when Lipskaya discovered that she was being followed in the ghetto, she and her group were given permission to leave for the forest.<sup>78</sup>



## Solidarity in Wartime Minsk

There were many cases in wartime Minsk of Jews and Byelorussians working together against the German occupiers, and of Byelorussians helping Jews to survive while in the ghetto or to escape it, sometimes hiding them, but more often helping them to reach the partisans. Some of these Byelorussians were awarded the title of Righteous Gentile, although relatively few, because applications to the Israeli commission bestowing this status were not possible under Soviet rule, but only after diplomatic relations between the Republic of Belarus and Israel were established in 1992. By that time many who had assisted Jews during the war had died.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the “Righteous Gentile,” with its implication of altruism, does not in any event entirely fit the Byelorussian wartime experience. The Byelorussians who helped Jews took risks, in many cases great risks, and were altruistic. But they also acted out of a view widely held in Minsk during the war that Jews and Byelorussians had a common interest in opposing the German occupation. This attitude of solidarity, which was the explicit basis for the collaboration of the Jewish and Byelorussian underground organizations, was also an implicit basis of the collaboration of Jews and Byelorussians outside the underground.

Even in Minsk, where over the course of the war probably the vast majority of Byelorussians came to regard Jews as fellow sufferers with a common enemy, only a small minority helped Jews. Everyone wanted to survive the war; most were reluctant to antagonize the Germans. Most

of the Byelorussians who took the risk of helping Jews did so out of deeply held principle. These included Communists, other underground members, and others acting out of the same ideology, as well as several Evangelical Christians. Others did the same out of friendship or acquaintanceship with particular Jews. Though most did not go out of their way to help Jews whom they did not know personally, many responded when confronted with a stranger who needed help. Many Jews' lives were saved by encounters with Byelorussians who told them which way to go in order to avoid a German checkpoint. But there were also those who were willing to turn Jews in.

This chapter describes two projects conducted jointly by the city and ghetto underground organizations: the construction and operation of an underground printing press, and a campaign to rescue children from the ghetto and place them in orphanages in the city or in the homes of Byelorussians. Both of these projects involved people outside the underground as well as underground members. The first underground printing press was initiated by Jewish and Byelorussian printers working in a German-run printing press in the city; the Jews were underground members, the Byelorussians were looking for the underground and hoping to join it. A Byelorussian woman whose Jewish husband was in the Red Army assisted them. The campaign to rescue ghetto children involved the efforts of two teams of women underground members, one Jewish, the other Byelorussian, working together. Many Byelorussians who were not members of the underground also participated in this effort, including two Evangelical Christians, the directors of almost all of the Byelorussian orphanages in Minsk, and others who were in positions that enabled them to help.

In this chapter I mention another project of the Minsk ghetto that involved both the ghetto and the city underground organizations: sabotage in German factories. But because Jews and Byelorussians usually worked in separate brigades, for the most part they conducted sabotage separately. This chapter also includes the story of Sarah Goland, who rescued her husband from the Germans and organized groups of Jews to leave the ghetto, with the help of Jews and Byelorussians, some of them underground members, some not. It includes as well the story of a group of Minsk teenagers whose friendships, maintained during the war across the ghetto border, saved lives. Chapter 6 describes Jews' journey to the forest, and how the underground and individual Byelorussians helped to make it possible. Both this chapter and the next are based on the recollections of ghetto survivors in interviews decades after the war and/or

memoirs written closer to the time of the war. As my account is based on the recollections of survivors, and does not include those who did not survive, it involves an inevitable distortion: most of those who survived received help. The stories of those who did not receive help and did not survive are gone. Nevertheless, it is clear from the history of cooperation between the ghetto and city underground organizations, and from the stories of survivors, that something took place in wartime Minsk that did not fit the postwar assumption of blanket indifference on the part of non-Jews toward Jews.

A second, smaller underground organization existed in Minsk alongside the main Minsk underground. This second underground organization was officially called the Party Committee of the City of Minsk and Neighboring Villages but was usually referred to as the Markevich Group, after its head, Alexander Markevich.<sup>2</sup> The Markevich Group, like the main underground organization, had a network of secret groups. Though the Markevich Group consisted largely of Byelorussians, it also included some Jews: several belonged to secret groups that operated outside the ghetto, and there were two groups that consisted entirely of Jews. One of these was a group of Jews who lived in the ghetto but worked at the radio plant outside the ghetto; the other consisted of a group of Jews inside the ghetto. The cooperation of Jews and Byelorussians within the Markevich Group counters any suspicion that the cooperative relations between Jews and Byelorussians in the main underground were somehow anomalous (perhaps the result of Kazinietz's Jewish identity and his influence).<sup>3</sup> There was also at least one underground group in wartime Minsk that never established contact with either the City Committee or the Markevich Group but operated on its own. One of its main objectives was rescuing Jews from the ghetto, or, as one member of the group put it, "saving Soviet citizens." The story of this group is told at the end of this chapter.

#### THE UNDERGROUND PRINTING PRESS

The establishment of the first underground printing press in Minsk was initiated by a group of Jews and a group of Byelorussian prisoners of war, both working in the Proryv Printing House, outside the ghetto, where under Soviet rule a newspaper directed at the Red Army had been published, and, now, under German control, two German-language newspapers were published. The Proryv Printing House was located in a courtyard where a military school had been located before the war;

a military newspaper had been published in the school. The neighborhood was a center of German activity; the Minsk Opera House, across from the courtyard, had been turned into a military storehouse. Both the Opera House and the courtyard in which the Proryv Printing House was located were guarded around the clock. The printing house was on the east bank of the Svisloch River, not far from the Tatar Bridge, which joined the urban east bank of the river to the Tatar Gardens on the west bank, an area consisting of fields where families living nearby, Tatars and others, cultivated vegetables. Beyond the Tatar Gardens lay the ghetto.

The Germans ran the Proryv Printing House with the labor of prisoners of war and Jews from the ghetto. Among the Jews in the printing house was a group of men who knew each other from having worked before the war at the Stalin Printing House, the largest printing house in Minsk; these men were members of the underground group in the ghetto under the leadership of Nahum Feldman. They included Mikhail Chipchin, formerly the technical director of the Stalin Printing House; Zalman (Zyama) Okun, the former head of its lithography department; Iosif Kaplan and several others, typesetters and printers.<sup>4</sup> Feldman survived the war, and the memoir that he wrote after the war contains information about the activities of the printers in his group. The others in this group who worked in the printing house were killed. Thus we lack their accounts of this history. The group of prisoners of war included a man who called himself Ivan Andreyevich Podoprigora and his two friends, Kuzma Kuzmich Troshin and Ivan Udod. A fourth prisoner of war, Mikhail Sidorovich Poloneichik, a member of the Communist Party, sensing that Podoprigora and his two friends were pro-Soviet and anti-Nazi, became acquainted with them and part of their group. Poloneichik survived the war and wrote an account of his wartime experiences (see fig. 11). We see what unfolded through his eyes and also through the eyes of Glafira Vasilievna Suslova, a Byelorussian woman who lived near the printing house and became acquainted with Podoprigora, supported his efforts, and also described her experiences in a memoir written after the war (see fig. 12).<sup>5</sup>

Before the war, Poloneichik had been the director of a printing house in Novogrudok, a city west of Minsk. When the German attack took place, he joined the Red Army; his unit was surrounded, and he was captured and taken to a prisoner-of-war camp. When the Germans asked if there were printers in the camp, Poloneichik, Podoprigora, and his friends Troshin and Udod were among the volunteers. The prisoners of war who had identified themselves as printers were taken to the Proryv



Figure 11. Ivan Semyonovich Udod, Mikhail Sidorovich Poloneichik, and Captain Nikolai Ivanovich Ivanov (who used the pseudonym Ivan Andreyevich Podoprighora). Photograph courtesy of Raissa A. Chernoglazova and the Belarussian State Museum of Film, Phono, and Photo Documents.

Printing House in Minsk, and Poloneichik was ordered to make typewriter platens. He said that he needed three coworkers, giving that number in the hope that Podoprighora and his two friends, whom he wanted to get to know, would be assigned to work with him. The trick worked, and Poloneichik became acquainted with Podoprighora and his two friends. He discovered that, as he had hoped, these were “reliable people,” supporters of the Soviets who were looking for underground connections. Podoprighora, it turned out, was a pseudonym for Captain Nikolai Ivanovich Ivanov, the chief of staff of a Red Army artillery regiment, who was hiding his identity to avoid being executed by the Germans. His two friends were from the same regiment. The four men were confident that there was an underground movement in Minsk, and were determined to find it and join it. Soon after winning the confidence of the three men, and learning that they wanted to find underground connections, Poloneichik noticed that Podoprighora was making special efforts to befriend one of the Jewish printers from the ghetto, Iosif Kaplan. Podoprighora, Poloneichik realized, must have somehow figured out that Kaplan was a member of the underground.

Kaplan offered to introduce Podoprighora to Kazinietz. This probably took place in September 1941; that is when Feldman remembers Kaplan bringing Podoprighora to the ghetto to meet Feldman and other members



Figure 12. Glafira Vasilievna Suslova. Photograph courtesy of Raissa A. Chernoglazova and the Belarussian State Museum of Film, Phono, and Photo Documents.

of the underground group. At this point neither a ghetto-wide nor a citywide underground had been formed, though Feldman was in touch with Smolar. But apparently members of Feldman's group already had contacts with underground members in the city. Through Kaplan, Podoprigora met Kazinietz, who assigned Podoprigora to take fonts, ink, and other printing materials out of the Proryv Printing House so that they could be taken to the ghetto, where Kaplan and his comrades would establish an underground press.<sup>6</sup> At around the same time, according to Feldman, two of the printers in Feldman's group, Chipchin and Opengeim, met with Mikhail Voronov, a Byelorussian and member of the underground, who, like Chipchin and Opengeim, had worked at the Stalin Printing House before the war. Voronov urged them not to organize the underground printing press for their group alone, but to continue gathering materials, presumably with the intention of establishing a press that would serve the Minsk underground as a whole, once it was formed.<sup>7</sup> Kazinietz and Voronov thus gave the blessings of the city underground, as well as some direction, to the project of forming an underground press, which had already been initiated by Feldman's group. By this time

Podoprigora and his friends were probably already discussing their role in this project with the printers from the ghetto.<sup>8</sup>

It was possible to take substantial numbers of fonts out of the Pro-ryv Printing House without the Germans noticing their absence because German-language newspapers were now being published there; the Cyrillic fonts that had been used when the printing house was under Soviet control had been stored. The underground, of course, wanted the Cyrillic fonts. Removing the fonts from the printing house involved getting them past the entryway to the printing house, where all of the workers were inspected upon leaving, and also getting them into the ghetto. It would have been extremely dangerous for Kaplan and the other Jewish printers to take the fonts out, because Jewish workers were inspected particularly carefully upon leaving the printing house, and they also had to go through an inspection as they entered the ghetto. So Podoprigora and his three friends assumed the task of getting the fonts out of the printing house. The four men had acquired passes that allowed them to leave the courtyard in which the printing house was situated and walk through Minsk unguarded. But they wore the uniforms of prisoners of war, and their passes were marked with red stripes, which indicated that they were under suspicion, and allowed them to be searched. Getting the fonts out of the printing house required finding a way of getting them past the inspection at the entry, and then finding a place to hide them in Minsk until they could be taken to the ghetto.

Poloneichik found a way of addressing the first problem. He was responsible for cleaning the printing house, and thus was able to go to the entryway at various times of day with his broom. He discovered that at a certain time of day there was an old man on duty who was more interested in playing his harmonica than in inspecting those who left the printing house. He and his three friends decided that this was a good time to leave the printing house. They positioned themselves at the end of a line of workers so that they could observe whether those ahead of them were being inspected or not. They tied packages of fonts to their belts and also put fonts in their pockets; their loose jackets hid the bulges. Once having left the printing house, they walked to the Svisloch River and turned into a yard, where they put the fonts, and sometimes other materials, in a shed. Here they were hidden until two teenagers from the ghetto, Komsomol members Misha Arotzker and Marik Brazer, retrieved them. These young men took the fonts across the Tatar Bridge, through the Tatar Gardens, and through a hole in the fence to the ghetto.

When this was impossible, they hid the fonts in the Tatar Gardens, and later someone left the ghetto to pick them up.<sup>9</sup>

The problem of where to store the fonts so that they could be taken to the ghetto had been solved by Podoprigora, with the help of the printer from the ghetto, Iosif Kaplan. Before the war, Kaplan had a friend, Abram Moiseevich Kuzinetz, who, like him, had worked at the Stalin Printing House. Kuzinetz's son, Isak, was married to a Byelorussian woman, Glafira Vasilievna Suslova; before the war Kuzinetz lived with his son, daughter-in-law, and the couple's young daughter in an apartment on the bank of the Svisloch River, near the military school that housed the Proryv Printing House. Through his friend Kazinetz, Kaplan met Kuzinetz's son, Isak, and his wife, Glafira. By the time the war began, Isak was in the Red Army. Suslova remained in the same apartment, with the couple's daughter. When the ghetto was established, Kuzinetz moved there so as not to endanger his Byelorussian daughter-in-law and his granddaughter with his presence in their house.

One day, as Kaplan was being led from the ghetto to work at the printing house, he took his yellow patch off, slipped out of the column, and went to Suslova's house. He told her that he was working at the printing house and that there was a Red Army officer there who needed civilian clothes so as to be able to move around Minsk, and who might need other kinds of help as well. Suslova agreed to help, and a meeting was arranged. Podoprigora went to Suslova's house, and she gave him her husband's civilian clothes. After that the two became friends. Podoprigora often dropped in to see Suslova and to chat. One day when Podoprigora arrived at Suslova's apartment, he was full of energy and seemed to her younger than before; he said he had been put in touch with the underground. "Well, Glafira Vasilievna, at last I have found exactly what I was looking for! Now I'll live, work, fight the enemy, and make this place very hot for them," he said excitedly. He told her about the assignment to take fonts and other materials out of the printing house and said that he still had the problem of finding a place to hide them until they could be taken to the ghetto. Suslova suggested that they use the shed in her yard.

From that time on, the fonts and other materials were kept in Suslova's shed until the young men from the ghetto came to get them and took them to the place where an underground printing press was being constructed in the ghetto. Sometimes, when the liaisons were not able to leave the ghetto but the materials were urgently needed, Suslova took them herself. Even after the printing press began to operate, in late



December 1941, Suslova and Podoprigora continued to occasionally go to the ghetto, to deliver more materials or news reports from radio broadcasts of the Soviet Information Bureau, to be included in the leaflets that were being published. Once Podoprigora asked Suslova to take a news report to the ghetto. She entered the ghetto, took the report to Kaplan's house, and was about to leave when Podoprigora entered the house, bringing another report that had just been received. The two left together. As they went through the wire fence behind the Jewish cemetery, a policeman who had been hiding and watching the hole came up to them to ask what they were doing in the ghetto. Podoprigora showed his pass, which allowed him to accompany Jewish workers into the ghetto, but Suslova could only say that she had been there with Podoprigora. The policeman apparently did not believe her. He beat her, knocking her teeth out and breaking her nose, while Suslova signaled to Podoprigora not to intervene, out of fear that if he did, the policeman would kill him. The policeman told Suslova that if he saw her at the fence again, he would shoot her. "But I still came to the ghetto when there was a need for it," she wrote. "I chose a different way but I did come."<sup>10</sup>

By December 1941 the underground printing press was in operation, publishing leaflets that reported the Red Army's resistance to the advance of the German army, giving a very different account of the war than that spread by the Germans, who claimed that the German army had taken over Moscow and that a victory parade was being planned. Sometime in late December the press was moved, at the request of the City Committee, to a house where underground members lived just outside the ghetto, on Ostrovsokovo Street. The City Committee asked Mikhail Chipchin, who, as the former technical director of the Stalin Printing House, was the most experienced printer in Feldman's group, to operate the printing press. Chipchin left the ghetto and went into hiding in the house on Ostrovsokovo Street, where he operated the press, printing leaflets and issues of a four-page "newspaper," perhaps better described as an expanded leaflet, called "News from the Motherland." The press was quite primitive, consisting of blocks of set type, printing ink, and a rolling pin. Printed pages were rolled off the press by hand, and then hung from clotheslines to dry. Members of the city and ghetto underground organizations distributed copies inside and outside the ghetto.

The underground printing press on Ostrovsokovo Street operated until late March 1942, when Chipchin was caught in the wave of arrests of underground members that took place in the wake of the German capture

of the underground Military Council. When the arrests began, two members of the underground, Lilya (Lola) Revinskaya and Antonina Melentovich, went through Minsk at Kazinietz's request, warning underground members to go into hiding. In her memoir, Melentovich wrote:

Lilya and I went to the underground printing house. . . . We went into the yard and approached the house. Naturally, we were nervous. For a moment Lilya slowed down. Then she took me by the hand and we burst into the house. We found ourselves in a big room . . . [a] door opened and a man came in. Lilya later told me that this was Mikhail Chipchin, the printer. Lilya warned Chipchin about the failure of the underground, about the traitors. She advised him to hide and never respond to anyone's calls.<sup>11</sup>

Chipchin did not manage to hide in time. He was arrested and was among the underground members hung in public squares in Minsk on May 9. The Ostrovsokovo Street underground press was destroyed. When the Military Council was arrested, Podoprigora had warned Suslova to leave Minsk; he gave her a forged document that enabled her and her daughter to move to a nearby village "to live with relatives." Suslova left Minsk with a friend who had driven a wagon into the city, for a short visit, and was returning to the countryside. By this time Suslova was hiding a young Jewish woman in her apartment; before leaving she made arrangements to transfer the young woman to another hiding place in the city.<sup>12</sup> Podoprigora told Suslova that he couldn't leave yet, because he had to keep sending people to the partisans and producing forged documents to enable them to leave. After Suslova left Minsk, Podoprigora was arrested; he died in prison.

The March 1942 failure destroyed the City Committee, and a new one was not established until May of that year. But in the meantime several members of the underground, apparently anticipating the creation of a new underground center, set about establishing a new underground press. The Voronovs were central to this effort. Mikhail Petrovich Voronov, fifty-six years old, had been the director of the Stalin Printing House before the war; his son, Mikhail Mikhailovich, twenty-four years old, had worked at the printing house as an electrician. Both continued to work at the Stalin Printing House during the war. Both father and son, and also son Mikhail Mikhailovich's wife, Elena, were members of the city underground. Their apartment, in a house opposite the ghetto, on Nemiga Street, was a center of underground activity; among other projects, the Voronovs printed food ration cards, facsimiles of the ration cards that the Germans distributed to those who worked for them. The cards printed by the Voronovs were distributed to underground members, enabling

them to forgo holding jobs under the Germans and work full-time for the underground.

Sometime in the early spring of 1942, the younger Mikhail Voronov met a young Jewish woman, Bronya Goffman, in the courtyard where the Stalin Printing House was located, and where he worked the night shift. He recognized Bronya: before the war, her aunt had lived next door to his family, and his parents had been friendly with her parents. Voronov stopped to chat with her, and she told him that she had a job as a cleaner for the wife of a German officer who lived in the courtyard. Bronya mentioned that she had a “husband” who worked at the printing press; it was clear to Voronov that for this reason, and also because the apartment where she worked was adjacent to it, she often had occasion to enter the press. After this conversation with Bronya, Voronov made a point of walking through the courtyard at times when he might encounter her, and chatting with her. In one of these conversations he asked her if she believed the Soviets would win the war. “Of course,” she said. “If I didn’t believe that, what would there be to believe in?” Voronov, apparently taking this as proof of her loyalties, asked her if she would be willing to help the underground, and she agreed.<sup>13</sup>

Bronya was twenty-three years old when she went into the ghetto with her small son. Her husband was in the Red Army, in the east. In the ghetto, she lived with her husband’s parents, her sister-in-law, Sonya, and Sonya’s child. Like others in the ghetto, they had been aware that a pogrom would take place on November 20, 1941. Bronya’s father-in-law was the only member of the family with a pass that identified him as employed by the Germans. In the belief that the Germans would not kill an adult with a work pass, or children with that adult, Bronya’s father-in-law gave his wife his work pass, and the children were left with her, while the others went into the courtyard looking for places to hide. Bronya’s father-in-law hid behind a woodpile, and at the last minute Bronya and Sonya saw neighbors motioning to them to climb a ladder to their apartment and join them in their *malina*. Bronya, Sonya, and Bronya’s father-in-law all survived the pogrom, but when they went back to the apartment, they discovered that the mother-in-law and the children were gone.

Devastated, Bronya and Sonya walked out of the ghetto; the chaos in the aftermath of the pogrom made it possible to do this without being stopped. They walked across the bridge and through the city to the Stalin Printing House, at the eastern edge of the city, where an uncle of Sonya’s worked; at night, he and the other Jews who worked at the press

slept in the basement. Sonya's uncle took the two young women in, and for several nights they stayed in the basement with him. But then he decided that it was too dangerous for him to keep two Jews who had escaped from the ghetto and did not have permission to stay in the basement. He told them that he would keep his niece, Sonya, but that Bronya would have to leave. Bronya knew that if she returned to the ghetto, she would be vulnerable to the next pogrom, especially since she had no job outside the ghetto to protect her during the daytime. As she was leaving, wondering where to go, a young man, Boris Pupko, who worked at the press as a typesetter and lived in the basement, ran after her and stopped her. He said that if she would pretend to be his wife, he thought that he could get her a job in the courtyard. The wife of a German officer who lived in the courtyard had mentioned to him that she needed a domestic servant. Pupko thought that the woman would give Bronya the job if he were to introduce her as his wife. Bronya agreed, and she was given the job. After this, sometimes she went back to the ghetto at night, and sometimes she stayed in the basement, but at least she had the protection of a job outside the ghetto. The officer's wife came to trust Bronya and often sent her on errands, to buy milk and other necessities, that took her through the courtyard and out into the surrounding streets.

Voronov had asked Bronya to work with the underground because the underground needed someone to take fonts and other materials out of the Stalin Printing House, and he had realized that Bronya would be able to help with this. She speculated, in an interview decades later, that Voronov trusted her enough to reveal his own underground membership and ask her to join because he had known her slightly before the war, because she had said that she was sure the Soviets would win, and also, perhaps, because she was a Jew.<sup>14</sup> Bronya's work for the underground consisted in taking fonts out of the printing house, putting them in a milk jug that Voronov supplied her with, and, at a set time, walking out of the courtyard to a nearby street corner, where she had been told that she would encounter a young man. She was to ask him, "Where is Green Street?" If the young man responded, "Here, to the left," she was to hand him the jug full of fonts. With Voronov's agreement, Bronya recruited her "husband," Pupko, to help her collect the fonts and other materials that she took to the young man who came to meet her on the street corner.

In May 1942, Voronov told Bronya that he had another, more difficult, assignment for her and Pupko. Many members of the underground

had been arrested, and a large number had been hung in public places in Minsk; the underground needed to issue a statement in response, in the form of a leaflet, and circulate it. Bronya and Pupko's task was to typeset the text so that the leaflet could be printed elsewhere. Voronov brought Bronya the text. Bronya and Pupko worked on it together: Bronya would drop in at the press to see Pupko and would whisper in his ear as he worked. While appearing to have an intimate talk with her husband, Bronya was actually reading the text of the leaflet to him as he typeset it. After two days of this, Bronya took the finished text to the apartment of a member of the underground who lived nearby, Vasili Saychik ("the Old Man").<sup>15</sup>

Soon after this Voronov told Bronya and Pupko that he had a yet more difficult assignment for them: they were to typeset the first issue of *Zvezda* (The Star), a newspaper that the underground was preparing to publish. At the end of May Voronov brought the text to Bronya and Pupko. There was a storeroom at the press in which old fonts were kept; the elder Voronov, who continued under the Germans to work as the manager of the printing house, obtained the key to the storeroom and gave a copy of it to Bronya and Pupko. There was no light in the storeroom, so the elder Voronov brought a lamp for them to use. For several nights running, after everyone else in the basement was asleep, Bronya and Pupko, wearing no shoes so as to avoid making noise, would tiptoe to the storeroom, unlock the door, and begin work. Bronya would hold the lamp while Pupko set the type. After three nights of work, the first issue of *Zvezda* was ready, and the younger Voronov took it away to be printed. Some time later, Bronya and Pupko heard from some railway workers who belonged to the underground that copies of the first issue of *Zvezda* had been brought to the railroad station, and they realized that their work had borne fruit. Some time after the first issue of *Zvezda* appeared, the Gestapo came and took Pupko away for questioning. At first the Germans had thought that *Zvezda* was printed in Moscow and smuggled into Minsk, but on carefully examining it, they had noticed that the type was of a kind used only in Minsk, and they had begun a search of the Minsk printing houses. Pupko told the Gestapo that he had nothing to do with it, that he was grateful to have his job and would never participate in such a thing, and they let him go.

In late July 1942 the text for the second issue of *Zvezda* was ready. The younger Voronov brought it to Bronya and Pupko, and they began work on it. But on August 5 their work was interrupted. That morning

a man named Sveridov, a member of the underground group that Bronya and Pupko now belonged to, came to the press and warned Bronya that the Gestapo had entered the printing house and were looking for Pupko. Bronya found Pupko asleep in the basement, woke him, and the two quickly left the press and the courtyard. Pupko, who was wearing nothing over his shirt, decided to go back and get his jacket. Bronya continued on, to the apartment of "the Old Man," Saychik, who had told her some time earlier that in case of an emergency she and Pupko should hide in his apartment. Saychik was not there, but Bronya got in through a window. She lay down on the couch so as to stay out of sight and waited. Pupko did not appear. That night, Saychik came and told Bronya that Pupko had been arrested. Bronya was moved, out of fear that Pupko might divulge the location of Saychik's apartment to the Germans. She was taken to the apartment of another underground member, and then to the apartment of a third; for twelve days she hid in the apartment of an underground member who lived in the same house as the Voronovs. While she was in hiding, underground members visited Bronya, bringing her food and also medicines and other things to take with her to the partisans. Meanwhile, arrangements were made to send her to a partisan unit. On August 20, a liaison from the Stalin partisan brigade arrived in Minsk, and Bronya left for the forest (see fig. 13).<sup>16</sup>

The night before the liaison from the partisan unit arrived, the elder Voronov arranged a farewell dinner for Bronya. The three members of the Voronov family, Saychik, and Sveridov, the man who had warned her to flee the printing house, were all there. They drank toasts to each other; the older Voronov wished Bronya success as a partisan. They promised each other that when the war was over, they would come together again and have another meal together. But of the six people at that farewell dinner only Bronya and Saychik survived the war. In late September 1942, during the second "failure" of the Minsk underground, the three Voronovs were arrested. They all died in prison. Sveridov was shot and killed in 1943.<sup>17</sup>

When she was working for the underground, Bronya did not know where the fonts and other materials that she took out of the Stalin Printing House were taken, or where the leaflet and issue of *Zvezda* that Pupko typeset with her help were printed. The first issue of *Zvezda* was published at the Voronov's apartment. After that, the printing press was moved to another underground apartment, and two more issues were published there. An underground member who worked with the press,



Figure 13. Bronya Goffman with other partisan women (Bronya Goffman in center). Photograph courtesy of Bronya Goffman.

Vladimir Kozachyonok, wrote after the war that the work of the press was very successful, and that the location of the press was kept secret even within the underground. “Our propaganda worked very well,” he wrote. “More people were willing to go to the partisans, even those who at first hesitated. People argued about where the newspaper was published. The majority thought it was published in partisan detachments and then brought to Minsk.” In his memoir, Kozachyonok wrote that after the September 1942 arrests he and two other underground members printed one last leaflet, distributed it in the city, hid the fonts that had been used in the printing house at the second underground apartment, and fled to the forest.<sup>18</sup> According to a history of the Minsk underground compiled by researchers for the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1959, a fourth issue was printed at a third underground apartment when the second was threatened with exposure.<sup>19</sup> Whichever account is correct, the underground printing press in Minsk ceased to function at this point. From this time on, underground publications were



printed in the forest, on presses run by the partisans, and brought to Minsk.

#### SABOTAGE AND SENDING SUPPLIES TO THE FOREST

Large numbers of Jews from the ghetto worked in factories outside the ghetto where goods were produced for the use of German soldiers. Members of the ghetto underground obtained jobs in the October Factory, where military clothing was made, at the Bolshevik Tannery, from which shoes and other leather goods were sent to the front, and in an armory (the Germans gave factories, as well as streets, new names when they disliked the old ones, but the local population continued to use the old Soviet names). At the October Factory one underground group, which included both Jews and Byelorussians, gradually removed boxes of cartridges that they had discovered in a little-used cellar, and took them to the ghetto, to be sent to the partisans.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, a group of Jewish underground members assigned to maintain the factory's heating system were collecting turf and explosives, brought to them by members of the city underground through a little-used gate leading to the cellar of the factory, with the intention of putting them in the factory's pipes and blowing it up. Somehow the Germans found out about this plan, and on June 1, 1942, Germans arrived at the plant and arrested all the heating system workers except one, who had seen them coming and had fled through the gate and hid in the ghetto for several days.<sup>21</sup> After these arrests those who had been smuggling boxes of cartridges into the ghetto stopped, and on December 18, 1942, they were included in a group sent to the forest by the city underground.<sup>22</sup>

Sabotage nevertheless continued at the October Factory. A group of shoemakers from the ghetto put nails in shoes in such a way that the shoes became impossible to wear for very long. A group of ghetto tailors sewed left sleeves into the right armholes of coats, and vice versa. Underground members in many departments of the factory carried boots, gloves, and coats out of the factory to be taken to the forest.<sup>23</sup> Members of the ghetto underground working in the factory's warehouse, packing goods to be sent to the front, cut sheepskin coats and put needles in fur gloves as they packed them to be sent to the front. They also smuggled patterns out of the factory, which were used in the ghetto for sewing padded jackets, caps with earflaps, and mittens, which were given to those leaving for the forest.<sup>24</sup>



In December 1941, members of the ghetto underground group headed by Lena Maizles had gotten jobs at the former Bolshevik Tannery, packing leather goods and putting them on trucks to be sent to the front. Members of a Byelorussian underground group, operating in the same factory, brought chemicals to them to pour on the leather goods as they loaded them, so that the leather would be destroyed en route to the front. This group continued to operate until the pogrom of March 2, 1942, when many of its members were killed. A week after the pogrom, Maizles and one other surviving member of the group left for the forest.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, in the winter of 1942, Rosa Lipskaya, the head of another underground group in the ghetto, had heard from Rosa Altman, an underground member who worked in the ghetto's Labor Exchange, that the Germans needed workers in their armory to assemble and store weapons. Altman obtained jobs for two members of Lipskaya's group, Tzypa Botvinik-Lupian and Ekaterina Tzirlina.<sup>26</sup> The two young women smuggled weapons parts out of the factory by putting small parts in their boots and machine-gun belts around their waists and by constructing false bottoms for the soup jars that they took to work and filling them with weapons parts. In the winter, they put rifle barrels into bundles of firewood that they picked up outside the armory, tied them with wire, and brought them into the ghetto.<sup>27</sup> Ghetto policeman and underground member Aaron Fiterson, along with underground member Slava Gebeleva-Astashinskaya, always stood at the ghetto gate when the two young women returned from work. They would meet the column of workers at the gate, take whatever packages the young women had brought, carry them through the gate, and take them to Fiterson's apartment in the ghetto. Later, weapons were assembled out of the parts and given to those leaving the ghetto for the forest. Twelve-year-old Grisha Kaplan, the nephew of a ghetto underground member, often left the ghetto, went to the armory, and helped the women by inconspicuously taking the soup jars that they had filled with weapons parts and bringing them back to the ghetto. He also warned the women when there were German guards at the gate. On those days they brought nothing back to the ghetto with them. In May 1943 Grisha was caught going through the fence and arrested. He was tortured and shot, but no one he knew was arrested afterwards. It was apparent that he had not given the Germans any information.<sup>28</sup>

In the early summer of 1943 the Germans discovered a group of workers at the armory who were stealing weapons, and all the workers were assembled in the courtyard to watch the hanging of two prisoners

of war and two Jews. Tzirlina and Botvinik-Lupian continued taking weapons parts out of the armory, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to do so without being caught.<sup>29</sup> Rosa Lipskaya meanwhile discovered that she was under surveillance in the ghetto, and was able to do little for the underground. She obtained permission from Hersh Smolar, who was now in a partisan unit in the Staroselsky Forest, west of Minsk, to leave the ghetto with her underground group and join Zorin's Brigade. In July 1943 Lipskaya and her group left the ghetto at a time when Aaron Fiterson was on duty at the gate and could help them leave safely. Arriving in the Staroselsky Forest, they discovered that a German blockade of the area was underway and that Zorin's Brigade had moved westward, to the Nalibokaya pushcha, which provided more protection from attack. After a month of wandering in the forest, they found Zorin's Brigade and were accepted into it.<sup>30</sup>

#### SARAH GOLAND

Twenty-eight years old and married with three children when she entered the ghetto, Sarah Goland arranged the release of her husband from the Minsk prison and hid him in her apartment in the ghetto. After he left for the forest, she joined the underground, became one of the main organizers of groups of Jews leaving for the forest, and eventually left for the forest herself, with her two small daughters. Goland was able to accomplish all this due to her extraordinary courage, and with the help of many people inside and outside both the ghetto and the underground organization (see fig. 14).

Sarah's husband, Israel, was one of the many Minsk men taken to Drozdy, and from there to the Minsk prison. In the prison, names were read from a list of Jewish Communists that the Germans had obtained; Israel did not respond when his name was read, and thus survived, and was released into the ghetto. Meanwhile, Sarah had her own indication of what was to come. In the weeks before the establishment of the ghetto, Sarah and the children waited in their apartment in Minsk for Israel's release. The apartment on the bottom floor of their house had been taken over by German soldiers, and one day one of the soldiers came up to their apartment, bringing soup and bread. Sarah's sister, who spoke some German, was in the apartment with them; the German told her that the SS would come soon and that they had orders from Hitler to kill the Jews. He urged the family to save themselves, and to avoid doing things that would attract the attention of the Germans. He added that not all



Figure 14. Sarah Goland, in 1929. Photograph courtesy of Elena Yoffe.

Germans were like him. He said that there was a rumor that Sarah's son was giving bread to prisoners of war, and urged him not to do it, because, he said, such behavior was likely to lead the Germans to suspect him of being the child of a Communist.

Sarah lost her son, the oldest of her three children, in the November 20 pogrom. Israel, who had returned from prison, was in hiding in the apartment in the ghetto where the family now lived; they had found a dugout under the Russian stove, which had apparently been used as a hiding place by Jews of an earlier time, to avoid being drafted into the czarist army. When the pogrom took place, Israel was already in this *malina*, but Sarah and the children were forced out of the house and into a column of Jews being marched out of the ghetto. Sarah said to them that she thought they should all run. Hearing a shot, she took each of her daughters by the hand and ran, but her son did not follow. Sarah pulled the girls into a nearby barn, where they hid until the following morning, when they returned home. After the pogrom Sarah, Israel, and their daughters left the ghetto and went to the factory where Israel had worked before the war. The Germans had appointed a man named Gelensky, a Byelorussian of German ethnic background who had worked in the factory,<sup>31</sup> as its director. Gelensky was trying to protect Jews who had worked there with him, and he urged the Goland family to stay. Israel worked as a shoemaker in the factory, and along with many other

Jews the family lived in an area that before the war had housed a fire brigade. One day, when Gelensky was not at the factory, a guard told Sarah that Germans had come and taken Israel away. When Gelensky returned, he said that probably someone had betrayed Israel and had told the Germans that he was a Communist. For the sake of their own safety, Gelensky said, Sarah and her daughters must return to the ghetto. He promised to try to find out where Israel was, and help him.

Sarah had a friend, Manya Yesinskaya, a Byelorussian woman whom she had known as a coworker and neighbor before the war. Since Sarah and her family had gone into the ghetto, Manya had been bringing food to the fence for them. She now told Sarah that a Byelorussian Komso-mol member whom both Sarah and Manya had known before the war, Vanya Korzon, had gotten a message to Manya that Israel was in the Shirokaya camp. Sarah found out that Korzon worked in a brick factory on the outskirts of Minsk, and she went there to see him. Korzon, who apparently had become a member of the underground, told Sarah that there was an underground organization in the Shirokaya camp, and that a Polish Jew named Blyatman, who lived in the ghetto, was a member of it. Sarah located Blyatman's wife in the ghetto and through her made contact with Blyatman. Meanwhile, Korzon and Gelensky collected valuable leather articles, purses, portfolios, and wallets, and gave them to Sarah, to give to Blyatman to use to bribe the Germans. With the help of these bribes, Blyatman was able to send Israel out of the camp to a cemetery in the Russian district in a pile of bodies of prisoners who had died of typhus. Israel was by this time in such bad shape that it was easy, Sarah said, to mistake him for a dead person. Manya Yesinskaya sent her children to meet the truck in the cemetery, and they took Israel home. After he recovered, Israel returned to the ghetto with a column of workers and went back into hiding in the dugout under the Russian stove. It was now early in the spring of 1942. Manya Yesinskaya remained in touch with Sarah and was to hide her and her daughters during the Purim pogrom and the Great Pogrom of July 28–31, 1942. During the latter pogrom Israel remained in hiding in the apartment, under the stove.<sup>32</sup>

In March 1942 Ya'akov Grinstein, his wife Bella, and their infant daughter were brought to the Minsk ghetto, following a massacre of nearly the entire Jewish community in the town in western Byelorussia where they lived. They were regarded in the ghetto, and regarded themselves, as Polish Jews, but they spoke Yiddish and Russian as well as Polish. They both survived the pogrom of July 28–31, but their infant daughter was killed. Bella, the baby, and a young woman who lived with



Figure 15. Ya'akov and Bella Grinstein. Reproduced from Abrasha Slukhovsky, *Fun Geto in di Velder* (From the Ghetto to the Forests) (Paris: Farlag Oyfsnai, 1975) 87.

the Grinsteins were in Jubilee Square when the Germans and their assistants began shooting into the crowd; the young woman, who was holding the baby, became separated from Bella, and she and the baby were shot. With the loss of their child Ya'akov and Bella decided that there was no longer any reason to stay in the ghetto, and they became determined to locate the underground so as to establish a connection with the forest, go to a partisan unit, and fight (see fig. 15).

In the wake of the pogrom, Ya'akov and Bella moved to another house in the ghetto, into a room across the hall from the room occupied by the Goland family. They became aware that Sarah's husband was in hiding in the Golands' room, and they also noticed that people often came to visit the Golands, stealthily, in the evenings, after the curfew was in effect. One day another neighbor told them that Israel had been arrested and shot. They went to give their condolences to Sarah and found her and her daughters cheerfully sharing a meal. No one seemed to be in mourning. That night, again, they heard someone quietly knock on Sarah's door, and heard her let the person in. Ya'akov and Bella became convinced that Israel had not been killed but had gone to the forest, and that Sarah was a member of the underground. They decided that Ya'akov must confront Sarah and try to convince her to let them join as well.

The next morning Ya'akov stayed home from work. Bella went to

Sarah and asked that she take Ya'akov a cup of tea later in the morning, because he was sick. At 10:00 AM Sarah knocked on Ya'akov's door and was startled to find that he was not in bed; she asked him if he had a fever. He said that he was not sick but had stayed home to talk with her, that he was convinced that she was a member of the underground, and that he and Bella desperately wanted to join so as to go to the forest and fight the Germans. He understood, he said, that Polish Jews were regarded with suspicion in the Minsk ghetto, because the collaborators in the Judenrat were from Poland. But he and Bella were not like those people, he said. Sarah went pale and vehemently denied having anything to do with the underground, but Ya'akov continued to press his case, and somehow his sincerity reached her. She began speaking of the need to organize resistance in the ghetto, and she pointed out that there was more to underground work than leaving the ghetto for a partisan unit: "We have to save as many Jews as we can, organize groups, and send them to the forest," she said. She promised to connect him with the underground. Ya'akov was jubilant; he had accomplished his goal. "We will take revenge," he told Bella, when she returned from work, "and perhaps also survive."

Ya'akov and Bella waited anxiously for a sign from Sarah. One day Ya'akov found Sarah waiting for him when he returned from work; she asked him to come to her room at 9:00 that evening. He arrived on the minute. He found a young woman sitting on the bed and others, mostly men but several women as well, gathered around the bed, listening to her intently. The young woman sitting on the bed was dressed in peasant style, with a kerchief around her head; she was describing the situation of partisan units in the Koydanov region, west of Minsk. When she finished speaking, she looked directly at Ya'akov. "I've seen you before," he said, in Polish, and then, remembering where he was, repeated the same in Russian. "I've seen you too," she responded, in Polish. "You don't remember me; I'm Bronya." She pulled her kerchief off, and Ya'akov recognized her as a friend, a former comrade from the Zionist movement in Uzda, his hometown in Poland (actually western Byelorussia). Bronya and Ya'akov took each other's hands. Bronya explained that she had joined the partisans and was now a liaison for the Kutuzov Brigade, west of Minsk, and had been sent to the ghetto to contact the underground and arrange for groups to come to the brigade. She had heard that Ya'akov was in Minsk, but had no idea where he might be. Ya'akov said, in a trembling voice, "If only you

knew what I have been through, and how difficult it has been to find you.”<sup>33</sup>

Sarah beamed. The display of friendship between Ya’akov and the partisan liaison in front of those who, Ya’akov learned, were central underground activists, vindicated Sarah’s judgment in having invited Ya’akov to join the underground. Bella was called into the room, and she and Bronya greeted each other warmly. Ya’akov and Bella began working with the underground. Bella, along with several other women, worked in a German arms workshop and smuggled weapons parts into the ghetto in their boots or around their waists. Ya’akov dug a hiding place under the floor of his and Bella’s room, where the weapons were hidden until they could be taken to the forest.<sup>34</sup>

Bronya, who had visited the ghetto regularly after the meeting in Sarah’s room, suddenly ceased coming, without warning or explanation. After several weeks the underground sent its own liaison to the Koydanov region and discovered that the Germans had attacked the Kutuzov Brigade and that the unit had fled toward the east; what had been the ghetto underground’s sole connection with a partisan unit, in the wake of the recent destruction of the Second City Committee, had been broken. But more liaisons were sent, and connections were established with other partisan units in the area, where there were several that included people from the Minsk ghetto or who had connections to the ghetto. One of these was the unit headed by Semyon Ganzenko, the former Red Army lieutenant, later prisoner of war, whom the ghetto underground had rescued from the Shirokaya camp. Another was the Parkhomenko Detachment, which came to include many Jews from the Minsk ghetto and elsewhere.

Sarah and others resumed organizing groups to leave for the forest. Sarah, who could not work outside the ghetto because she had to care for her two small daughters, supported herself and her children by baking bread for others in the ghetto with flour that they brought to her, and also by buying bits of food at the illegal market in the ghetto and selling them in her apartment. This served as a cover for underground activity: if she were questioned about the traffic in and out of her room, she could say that people were coming to buy things. Partisan liaisons regularly came to Sarah and told her when she could send groups and how many people they could contain. In June 1943 Sarah received word from the Parkhomenko Detachment that it was time for her to leave the ghetto along with a final group. A few days before the group was to depart, a member of the Jewish Police came to Sarah’s room and said that there

were rumors that she was organizing groups to leave the ghetto. He arrested her and took her to the ghetto jail. But Sarah Levina, a member of the underground who worked as a secretary for Epstein, the head of the Jewish Police, argued that Sarah Goland could not possibly be a member of the underground because she was the mother of two small children; no mother, Levina argued, would risk her children's lives in this way. Sarah Goland was released. On June 22, 1943, Sarah Goland, her two daughters, Ya'akov, and Bella left the ghetto with the last group that Sarah organized. They all survived the war.<sup>35</sup>

#### RESCUING CHILDREN FROM THE GHETTO

Sometime during the winter of 1941–42 Chasya Pruslina, one of the ghetto underground's two main liaisons to the city, Kazinietz's partner, Elena Revinskaya (usually called Lola or Lilya), and other women in the city underground began working together to get children out of the ghetto and place them either in Byelorussian orphanages in the city or in the homes of city underground members or their friends. At the beginning of the war there were seventeen orphanages and kindergartens (that is, facilities in which children were kept overnight) in Minsk.<sup>36</sup> Almost all continued to function through the war.<sup>37</sup> Children whose features did not mark them as Jews and who could speak Russian, especially those who could speak without a noticeable Yiddish accent, were easiest to disguise as non-Jews. There were also members of the underground who were willing to take children from the ghetto into their homes, though it was sometimes difficult to explain the sudden appearance of additional children in the family to curious neighbors, and the large numbers of Germans in Minsk raised the danger that they might spot such children themselves. Furthermore, if an underground member was arrested, children in the household might be identified as Jews in the process or, at best, be left on their own. Due to these dangers, some underground members who took Jewish children into their homes sent them to villages in partisan territory, where they could be taken in by peasant families and were less likely to fall into the hands of the Germans.

After Pruslina, Revinskaya, and others began rescuing children, the City Committee endorsed the effort and set up two teams of women, one in the ghetto and one outside it, with instructions to work together to get as many children out of the ghetto as possible. Elena Voronova lived on Shornaya Street, across from the ghetto; she was the wife and daughter-in-law of the junior and elder Mikhail Voronovs, who worked at the



Stalin Printing House; the Voronov apartment was a center of underground activity. Out of her window, Voronova could see for some distance along the ghetto fence. At an appointed time a Jewish woman, a member of the ghetto team, would approach the fence with one or more children. When there were no police or German soldiers in sight, Voronova would give a signal, and the Jewish woman would either send the child or children under the fence, with instructions to run to a Byelorussian woman waiting on the other side, or would go under the fence with them and deliver them herself. The Byelorussian woman would then take the child or children to a safe place; in many cases children were taken to Voronova's home, where they were given food and clothing, and where they waited until dark to be taken to an orphanage or to the home of another underground member. Voronova kept a supply of children's clothes in her apartment, donated by members of the underground, so that children from the ghetto could be given clothes in better condition than the rags that they wore out of the ghetto and less likely to identify them as ghetto children. Many of the children were transferred to an orphanage next door to Voronova's house. Tatiana Gerasimenko, another member of the city underground actively involved in this campaign, lived on Nemiga Street; her apartment, like Voronova's, was across the street from the ghetto. Gerasimenko made arrangements with women in the ghetto to bring children to her home.<sup>38</sup> Other places to which many children were taken included a home for foundlings on Myasnikova Street, just outside the ghetto, and the Minsk City Hall; from both of these points, children were sent to orphanages.<sup>39</sup>

Smolar wrote that during the first few weeks of this campaign 70 children were rescued through the joint efforts of the teams of Jewish and Byelorussian women. Chasya Pruslina wrote after the war: "I took children across 'the border' and handed them to Anna [Pruslina's friend, city underground member Anna Andreyevna Yezubchik] or other women at a specified time in a specified place. They took the children to the Board [City Hall] for warrants and then to the orphanages . . . Russian women whom we knew kept many Jewish children. The director of an orphanage, Trubenok, told me that not fewer than three hundred Jewish children were placed in her orphanage. She gave Russian names to Jewish children who were left at her door."<sup>40</sup>

In order to further efforts to get children out of the ghetto and find safe places for them in the city, Misha Gebelev, the ghetto underground's representative on the City Committee, contacted an official who worked in the Minsk City Hall, Vasili Semyonovich Orlov, who was in charge of

placing abandoned children in Minsk's orphanages. According to the arrangement they made, any child who was delivered to Orlov's office, room 20, on the second floor, between the hours of 9:00 and 11:00 in the morning was regarded as likely to be a Jewish child in urgent need of placement.<sup>41</sup> Orlov gave the children Russian names and sent them to orphanages whose directors he knew to be willing to protect Jewish children. When he knew of an impending German inspection of an orphanage, he would warn the director so that children in danger of being identified as Jews could be hidden. Records of the birth names of children placed in orphanages were not kept, either by Orlov or by orphanage directors, and some of the children who were given Russian names were so young at the time that by the end of the war they had no memory of what their real names were or who their parents might have been. Some could only guess, later, that they were probably Jewish.<sup>42</sup>

Some children, however, were old enough to remember their names. Emilia Lifshitz and her brother Volodya escaped from the Minsk ghetto in February 1943. In the Russian district people were afraid to take them in, because they were Jews. They went to City Hall, because they remembered having heard of another child from the ghetto that had gotten into a Byelorussian orphanage with the help of someone in the City Council. Orlov, who was in charge of the office that dealt with abandoned and orphaned children, asked for the names of their parents and where they had worked. Emilia said that their parents had died in the bombing at the beginning of the war, and gave a false, Byelorussian name; she also said that their father had worked at the Minsk Pedagogical Institute. Orlov said that he had worked at that institute also. He looked at the children carefully and remarked that he had not known anyone by the name Emilia had given. Emilia said, in a statement after the war, that she thought Orlov knew who they were, because she looked very much like her father, whom he had known. Orlov sent the children on to an orphanage. After Minsk was liberated, Orlov advised Jewish children to resume using their original names; Emilia and Volodya were among those who did this.<sup>43</sup>

Orlov was apparently not a member of the Byelorussian underground, but he had met with Chasya Pruslina and Misha Gebelev, the two main liaisons to the city underground from the ghetto, to discuss ways of protecting Jewish children in Byelorussian orphanages. Chasya Pruslina had graduated from the Department of History at the Pedagogical Institute, where Orlov worked, and this may have facilitated their connection.<sup>44</sup> According to Orlov's wife, Galina, interviewed after

Orlov's death, there was only one director of a Minsk orphanage who reported Jewish children to the Germans. When Orlov learned of this, he ceased sending Jewish children to the orphanage that she directed.<sup>45</sup>

Some children from the ghetto arrived in Byelorussian orphanages after having been cared for by Byelorussians who became unable to keep the children in their homes. Frieda Kissel was five when she entered the ghetto with her parents, Esfir and David. Frieda, with her blonde hair and grey eyes, had a better chance of passing for a Byelorussian than many children in the ghetto, and since Russian had been spoken in her home, she was free of the Yiddish accent that identified many ghetto children as Jews. Frieda's father, David, was a Communist and member of the ghetto underground, and, after Smolar's departure from the ghetto in August 1942, the head of its leading Committee of Three. Esfir, who spoke German as well as Russian, had obtained a job outside the ghetto caring for the dog of a German officer.<sup>46</sup> The officer for whom Esfir worked lived in the same courtyard as Maria Sergeyevna Gorokhova, the member of the city underground who had led Smolar out of the ghetto, and in whose apartment Smolar was now in hiding. Esfir became a liaison between the city and ghetto underground organizations: Smolar would give a message to Gorokhova, who would manage to cross paths with Esfir in the courtyard, exchange a few words with her, and in so doing, pass on Smolar's message. Esfir would then give the message to her husband when she returned to the ghetto. Messages from David Kissel to Smolar were passed in the same way, from Esfir to Gorokhova.

Esfir and David Kissel left the ghetto for the forest in late November 1942, but before doing so Esfir made arrangements for Frieda to be cared for outside the ghetto. Olga Nikolayevna Zhorzh, a doctor and member of the underground whom Esfir was acquainted with, and who worked in a hospital in Minsk, agreed to take Frieda. On the day that Olga Nikolayevna was to take Frieda, Esfir brought her daughter to work with her, and Olga Nikolayevna met them and took Frieda home with her. For some time Frieda lived with Olga Nikolayevna, sometimes accompanying her to the hospital where she worked, and helping her to take medicines out of the hospital to be sent to the partisans. But in March 1943 Olga Nikolayevna was arrested, along with the other members of her underground group; a German officer came to Olga Nikolayevna's apartment while a meeting was taking place. Before being taken to prison Olga Nikolayevna asked for permission to take Frieda to a neighbor, and the officer allowed her to do so.

The neighbor took Frieda to an orphanage, where she was baptized and given a Russian name, Elena. A former neighbor of the Kissels', who knew the director, told her that Frieda was a Jew. The director would probably have guessed this anyway, because although Frieda used Olga Nikolayevna's family name, Zhorzh, her given name, Frieda, suggested as much. The director assured Frieda and a number of other Jewish children who arrived in the orphanage around the same time that they would all be baptized; this, he said, would make them Byelorussians. The children were baptized in a Minsk church, and crosses were hung around their necks. Frieda spent six months in the orphanage. While she was there, a woman who had been a neighbor of the Kissels' before the war came to the orphanage and recognized Frieda. Frieda was brought to the director's office. The woman said to her, "Don't worry, I'm not going to report you; I'm going to be your godmother." The woman became the godmother not only of Frieda but also of all of the Jewish children who had been baptized along with Frieda, and regularly brought flour for them to the orphanage, which was added to boiling water to make a thin flour soup; others, who lived through the war in Minsk, mention flour soup as having been a staple of their diet. Food was so scarce in wartime Minsk that in the spring and summer the orphanage children were taken to fields in Minsk to scavenge for weeds.

Six months after Esfir was admitted to the orphanage, another of Olga Nikolayevna's former neighbors came and asked the director for permission to take Frieda home with her. Though Frieda did not like this woman (it later became clear that the woman wanted custody of Frieda so as to get Olga Nikolayevna's apartment and unclaimed possessions), the director urged Frieda to go with her, because by this time children in many orphanages were being sent to Germany, and in this process Jewish children were in danger of being identified as such. When Esfir and David returned to Minsk after the liberation, they found Frieda in what had been Olga Nikolayevna's apartment, extremely thin and poorly cared for, but alive.<sup>47</sup>

David Taubkin was another child from the ghetto who reached a Byelorussian orphanage. He was later transferred to a second orphanage, where he remained until a week before the liberation of Minsk. David's parents were highly educated professionals: his father, before joining the Red Army, had been a doctor, and his mother taught history and later literature on the university level. David had grown up speaking Russian rather than Yiddish at home and thus spoke it fluently and without an accent. On November 7, 1941, before the first pogrom in the ghetto,

David's mother sent him and his cousin of the same age out of the ghetto to the house where the family had lived before the war, and where the nurse who had cared for David, Leonarda Ferdinandovna Divaltovich, still lived. Afraid that a neighbor might see the two boys and report them, Leonarda Ferdinandovna took them to a garden where she worked, and the three slept in a shed. A policeman came to investigate. Leonarda Ferdinandovna explained that she worked in the garden, and said that David was her son, and his cousin her nephew. The policeman was satisfied with this explanation and left.

When the pogrom was over, the boys returned to the ghetto. In May or June 1942, David's eighteen-year-old sister Lydia decided to go to the partisans, and she left the ghetto, taking David with her.<sup>48</sup> Lydia left David in the city, with his former nurse, Leonarda Ferdinandovna, while she went on to the forest. Leonarda Ferdinandovna took David to a doctor, Galina Nikolayevna Lemetz, a friend of the Taubkin family. Lemetz's daughter had studied with Lydia, and before the war she often visited the Taubkin home. Lemetz took David to a children's hospital in Minsk. A month later, she returned and took him to an orphanage, where, on her suggestion, he was given the Russian name Victor Savitzky, which he used for the duration of the war. Later he became ill and was transferred to a second orphanage, this one run by Vera Leonardovna Sparning, a woman of German extraction; for official documents she used the Russified version of her name, Sparnina (see fig. 16). A week before the Red Army arrived, Vera Leonardovna warned David that the children might be sent to Germany, and he left the orphanage and went to his former home and stayed with his nurse; soon after the liberation of Minsk, David's father returned to Minsk and found his son. David estimated that at the time of liberation there were about 100 children in Vera Leonardovna's orphanage, and he remembered that after the war about 22 of them identified themselves as Jews. Vera Leonardovna told the Germans during the war that there were no Jewish children in her orphanage. In correspondence with Taubkin after the war, Vera Leonardovna made it clear that she had been aware that he and many of the others under her care were Jews.<sup>49</sup>

Vera Leonardovna Sparning's orphanage, Minsk Orphanage #7, was one of two Minsk orphanages that the Germans had placed under the aegis of Anton Mitrofanovich Kietsko, the presbyter, or priest, of the Minsk Evangelist Christian Baptist Church. After the Germans arrived, many religious leaders set about reviving congregations that had been closed under Soviet rule. Kietsko contacted twenty or so Evangelist



Figure 16. Vera Leonardovna Sparning. Photograph courtesy of David Taubkin.

Christian Baptist families in Minsk and applied for a permit to establish a church. His congregation was assigned to a church building just outside the ghetto, at the corner of Ostrovsky and Nemiga streets. Later Kietsko was called to a meeting by Ivanovsky, the head of the Uprava, or City Hall. Like many others at the Uprava, Ivanovsky had served under the Soviets and had continued to serve under German rule. Ivanovsky said to Kietsko, "There are more than six hundred children in Minsk without parents. Among these there are many Jewish children; this doesn't matter, we have to save their lives." (This was early in the war; as time went on, more children became orphans.)

Ivanovsky told Kietsko that the religious denominations in Minsk were being given responsibility for overseeing the Minsk orphanages, including providing them with food for the children. The Russian Orthodox Church, he said, had taken responsibility for two orphanages, and the Catholic Church had taken two. The Evangelist Baptist Christian Church, he said, must also take two. Kietsko was assigned responsibility for Orphanage #7, directed by Vera Leonardovna Sparning, and Orphanage #2, directed by Maria Ivanovna Voronich.<sup>50</sup> As a presbyter, Kietsko traveled regularly through Byelorussia, giving services at churches. At the end of his services he would ask people to donate food and clothes

for the children in the orphanages, and he found that many people were receptive to his pleas. Food was more plentiful in the villages, where people grew their own crops, than in the city, and many peasants were willing to help the orphans in Minsk.<sup>51</sup> Many residents of Minsk, aware that children in the orphanages needed food, would visit orphanages and become sponsors of individual children, usually those whom they had known before the war. Kietsko wrote in his memoir that many Minsk residents who came to the orphanages recognized Jewish children who had been their neighbors before the war, and took care of them, presumably by bringing food for them to the orphanage. But there were unfortunate limits to this generosity, perhaps resulting from fear. There were five girls in one of the orphanages whose faces were unmistakably Jewish. No one offered to become personal sponsors of these children, Kietsko wrote.<sup>52</sup>

The Germans occasionally held unannounced inspections of the orphanages, with the aim of discovering Jewish children. Kietzko, Sparning, Voronich, and Yakov Rapietzy, a second Evangelical priest who joined them in this effort, worked together to protect the Jewish children in the two orphanages from being identified. A German civilian, Gerhard Kruger, who worked at the Uprava, assisted them in their efforts. Kruger, also an Evangelical Baptist minister, regularly attended Kietsko's services, and he and Kietsko had become acquainted; through Kietzko, Kruger also became acquainted with Rapietzy, who maintained the link with Kruger when Kietsko was traveling outside Minsk. Sparning appointed one of her charges, Vera Stepanovna Ivanova, a Byelorussian child who was about ten years old, as liaison. Two or three times a week Sparning would send Vera to Kietzko's church or to Rapietzy's house; she would return with a note from either Kietsko or Rapietzy with the latest information from Kruger.<sup>53</sup> Kietsko, Rapietzy, and the directors of the orphanages used a variety of methods to protect the Jewish children in the orphanages. The children were given certificates with Russian names and were baptized, and crosses were hung around their necks. They were taught to pray. One of the signs that German inspectors looked for, in searching for Jewish children, was dark hair, since the hair of Byelorussian children was characteristically light brown or blonde. The pervasive problem of lice suggested a solution: along with those children who really did have lice, Jewish children with dark hair could have their heads shaved.

Inspections of the children were conducted outdoors, ostensibly out of deference to the Germans' fear of contracting typhus or other diseases if

they were to enter the orphanage. The children of the orphanage, minus those being hidden, would be brought outside and placed in a line; the German inspectors would stand at a distance, look them over, and count them. When inspections were to be conducted, the five girls at one of the orphanages who were in particular danger of being identified as Jews, despite their shaved heads and the crosses around their necks, were taken out of the orphanage and hidden elsewhere. But the Germans knew how many children there were in the orphanage and would have noticed if there had been five too few in the line outside the orphanage. So Kietsko would bring his two daughters to the orphanage before the inspection, and also three daughters of a neighbor. The girls would change into the ragged clothes that orphanage children wore, and stand in the line. For the girls, standing in line in place of the Jewish children was a lark. Kietsko's eldest daughter, Lydia, who was seven when the war began, later recalled that she didn't realize until after the war that she had been doing anything dangerous, because her father never described it to her that way, though he did give her instructions about what to say if the Germans should question her. In fact, if the Germans had discovered the trick that was being played on them, the girls, their parents, and Voronich, the director of the orphanage, would have been arrested and no doubt executed.<sup>54</sup> According to Kietsko's memoir, written after the war, together the two orphanages sheltered 126 children during the war. Seventy-two of these children were Jews. All of them survived the war.<sup>55</sup>

After Soviet rule ended, Kietsko's daughters applied for posthumous recognition of their father as a Righteous Gentile, and many Jews who had survived the war in the orphanages that he supervised wrote supporting statements, some of which contain mention of the contributions of others, besides Kietsko, to their survival.<sup>56</sup> Idiana Lipovich wrote: "In September 1943 the parents of my prewar classmate, Raissa Kirilovna Semashka, who hid me in their cellar during the pogroms in the Minsk ghetto, sent me through City Hall to Orphanage #2. . . . There were 45 Jewish children there. . . . The priest of the Evangelist church, Anton M. Kietsko, came to us with food in order to feed starving children. He knew that there were Jewish children in this orphanage and did all he could to save us."<sup>57</sup> Lydia Alexandrovna Kompaniets-Petrova was taken out of the Minsk ghetto by a woman whom she saw leaving the ghetto with three other children in tow. Lydia, who was three years old when the war began, and probably four or five at this time, grabbed the hem of the woman's skirt and clung to it, so the woman took her as well as the others. Lydia was placed first in Orphanage #2 and then transferred to #7.



"The teachers in the orphanage signed certificates concealing our real nationality," she recalled.<sup>58</sup>

There is no way of knowing how many Jewish children survived the war in orphanages in Minsk. The Soviet officials who returned to Minsk did not collect this information, and even if they had tried to do so, the numbers would have been only approximate, because many children did not remember where they were from or who their parents were. Nevertheless, the scraps of information that we have, about the underground's campaign to rescue children from the ghetto, and about the Minsk orphanages, indicate that hundreds of children were saved in this way. Without the joint efforts of the Jewish and Byelorussian underground organizations, and the efforts of Byelorussians who were not members of the underground, nowhere near as many Jewish children would have survived the war as did.

#### RESISTANCE AND SUPPORT IN A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

When the war began, three of the five members of the Zuckerman family, eighteen-year-old Lucia (or, more formally, Lyubov), her fourteen-year-old sister, Rosa, and the girls' father, were in Minsk. Lucia's twin brother, Lonya, was in the Red Army, in the east, and the girls' mother was in nearby Novogrudok, visiting her brother and his family. She called to say that she was taking a train home, and her husband and the couple's two daughters waited for her instead of fleeing to the east, as many others were attempting to do. She did not arrive. Her train was diverted to the east and did not stop in Minsk; she reached Russia, where she survived the war. The Zuckerman sisters and their father were soon forced into the ghetto. There the girls' uncle Boris and his son Lonya joined them; they had fled Novogrudok, where they lived, because Boris was a well-known Communist there. In the Minsk ghetto, he and Lonya lived with their relatives and took the name Zuckerman to avoid detection. Before the war, Lucia and Rosa Zuckerman had been part of a tight-knit circle of friends who studied at the same school, most of whom were classmates of Lucia's. The circle of friends included, in addition to the Zuckerman sisters, Lila Fein, Lila Glazer, and Olga Simon. Lila Fein and Lila Glazer were Jews. Olga Simon was Ukrainian; she had come to Minsk to live with her older sister, Varvara, and to help care for Varvara's two small children. By the time the war broke out, Varvara's husband was in the east, with the Red Army.<sup>59</sup>

Olga, who was a classmate of Lucia's, wrote, many years after the war,

of her circle of friends: "We were a really nice crowd, although Rosa was younger. Lucia and Rosa had a brother, Lucia's twin. Very often other boys visited him, and we liked to spend time with them as well. The Zuckermans had a gramophone, and we could even dance there. They lived on Freedom Square, not far from where we lived. There was no transport anyway, so we went to one another on foot. It was a wonderful time and we had such nice friendships. Nobody ever thought about one of us being a Ukrainian, another being a Jew. We did not even know what that meant."<sup>60</sup> The Zuckerman sisters, speaking, also, decades after the war, agreed. "We didn't even notice who was a Jew and who wasn't," Lucia said. "Olga would come to our place just the way she would go to her own house, at school we studied together; there was no difference." Rosa added: "Maybe in the government there was some attitude toward Jews, but for us children, there was no difference, our parents accepted all our friends without question, our friends' parents accepted us the same way. [Later] Stalin took up Hitler's idea, started sending people to camps, but we didn't know about this. Life was good."<sup>61</sup>

When the war broke out, Olga Simon, her sister Varvara, and Varvara's children left Minsk and lived in the countryside for a month or so; when they returned, Olga was unable to find her friends and asked another classmate whom she met on the street where they were. He named streets inside the ghetto. She asked why they had moved. "How can you ask 'why'? They are Jews," he said, and he explained that the Germans had established a ghetto and ordered the Jews to move into it. Olga realized for the first time that most of the others who had been in her class at school were Jews, including her friends. She began going to the ghetto to visit them, pulling the wire apart with her hands and crawling through. At first, she wrote, having to crawl through barbed wire to visit her friends seemed strange rather than terrifying. The pogroms in the ghetto had not yet begun, and, like many Minsk residents, she assumed that the Germans would soon be gone, and life would return to normal. Rosa and Lucia also began leaving the ghetto to visit Olga. They would leave with a column of workers, pull the yellow patches off their clothes, dash out of the column, go to Olga's house, and later return to the ghetto in the same way. Olga and the Zuckerman sisters also stayed in touch with their friends Lila Fein and Lila Glazer, both now in the ghetto. Lila Fein had blonde hair, Lucia's hair was light-colored, and neither had stereotypically Jewish features, so they left the ghetto more often than the others. Lila Glazer's mother, Dasha, had remained outside the ghetto for the same reason: her looks did not give away her Jewish identity. She,

too, remained in touch with the girls, including Olga, the one member of the circle of girls now living outside the ghetto. Olga introduced Dasha to her sister, Varvara, and the two women began going together to villages outside Minsk to exchange things for food. Olga took some of the food to her friends in the ghetto. While Varvara and Dasha were in the villages exchanging things, they also looked for contacts with partisan units.

Before the war, Lila Fein and her family had lived next door to a woman named Olga Sherbatsevich, a nurse who worked in one of Minsk's hospitals. Lila had been close to Olga Sherbatsevich and her family; the Zuckerman sisters also knew the Sherbatsevich family, not only through Lila but because Olga Sherbatsevich's son, Volodya, was a classmate of Lucia's. Once, after the ghetto was established, Olga Simon and Lila Fein went to see Olga Sherbatsevich, who told them that prisoners of war were being held in the hospital where she worked, and that she was helping them to escape and to reach the partisans. She asked the girls to assist her by collecting civilian clothes in the ghetto and bringing them to her. Olga Simon and Lila Fein passed this message to the Zuckerman sisters and Lila Glazer, and the Zuckerman sisters, along with the two Lilas, began collecting clothes in the ghetto. They took things that had been left behind in houses where people had been killed. They told people whom they trusted that they were collecting clothes for prisoners of war going to the partisans, and people gave them what old clothes they could spare. Olga Simon came to the ghetto with bags of flour and other foodstuffs and took the clothes that her friends collected to Olga Sherbatsevich, who, the girls in the ghetto hoped, might find a way of sending them as well. Olga Sherbatsevich successfully sent one group of prisoners of war to the partisans, but then she was betrayed. On October 26, 1941, Sherbatsevich, her son, Volodya, and the rest of her family were publicly hung in Minsk.

Olga Simon continued to visit the ghetto, and the Zuckerman sisters and the two Lilas continued to visit her. When they wanted a bath, they went to Olga's house; when there were warnings of pogroms, they went to her house and stayed there for several days. Though Olga's neighbors could see that she often had visitors, and that at times of trouble in the ghetto there were likely to be several visitors who stayed for several days, no one reported Olga to the authorities, not even a policeman who lived in another apartment in the same house. Sometimes Lucia and Rosa brought clothes and other items from the ghetto and exchanged them with Varvara for food, which they took back to the ghetto.

Once, when Varvara's young daughter, Olga's niece, fell ill with bronchitis, Varvara went to the ghetto to find medicine; she met a former neighbor now living in the ghetto, Riva Vishnevetskaya, who promised to get it for her. On the day that Vishnevetskaya delivered the medicine to Varvara, a pogrom took place in the ghetto. On going back to the ghetto the following day, Vishnevetskaya discovered that her entire family had been killed. She returned to Olga and Varvara's apartment. She remained for two years; Olga and Varvara introduced her as their cousin. Eventually someone who worked for the Germans saw Vishnevetskaya on the street and recognized her. The Simon sisters had a friend in Vilnius, a bachelor, and they proposed a match, in order to get Vishnevetskaya out of Minsk. They sent her to Vilnius with a friend who was going there with his wagon. A marriage soon took place. Dasha, Lila Glazer's mother, also stayed with the Simons at times; she had many friends and acquaintances in the city and stayed with others as well. In her memoir, Olga Simon wrote: "In April 1997 I was appointed Righteous among the Nations. I am proud of it, but I don't consider what my sister and I have done to be heroism. We only helped people, irrespective of their nationality. If I had not had friends who were Jewish before the war, if I had not known some of them, maybe we would not have saved anyone. We only helped our friends and our acquaintances."<sup>62</sup>

Lucia Zuckerman and Lila Glazer were the first among the circle of friends to leave the ghetto. In the course of going to villages outside Minsk, Varvara Simon had established a connection with the partisans; she and Dasha decided to send Dasha's daughter Lila and Lucia Zuckerman to a partisan unit, choosing Lucia rather than Rosa because Lucia's fair hair and skin allowed her to pass as a non-Jew more easily than her younger sister. Toward the end of March 1943 Lucia and Lila left the ghetto and went to Olga Simon's house, where they stayed overnight. Varvara told them that they could find a partisan brigade near the village of Azerichena, and Dasha Glazer, Lila's mother, told them where to go to get on a truck that was leaving Minsk in that direction, taking women to the countryside to exchange items for food. The girls went to this place and got on the truck. A German gendarme ordered the driver to stop and began inspecting documents, which the girls did not have. Fortunately a storm came up suddenly, and the gendarme decided to check only the driver's documents and let the truck through. They reached the village of Azerichena, found the Byelorussian partisan unit to which they had been directed, and were accepted into it. Eventually

the unit split, and Lila went with the newly created unit, toward the west. Lucia remained in the original unit, working as a cook and nurse. She was the only Jew in the unit; nevertheless, she said in a later interview, she never suffered as a result of this but was always treated the same as others. She returned to Minsk after the liberation. She looked for Olga Simon and found that she had left the city, but a neighbor of Olga's, who remembered Lucia as Olga's friend, took her in. All of Olga's neighbors accepted her presence and treated her well, Lucia said.<sup>63</sup>

When Lucia and Lila Glazer went to the partisans, Rosa Zuckerman and Lila Fein remained in the ghetto. The Zuckerman and Fein families were by this time sharing an apartment, and Lila and Rosa had become nearly constant companions. Rosa, her uncle Boris, and her cousin Lonya all worked in the October Factory in the city, making shoes for German soldiers. Boris and Lonya had managed to bring new shoes to the ghetto by wearing worn-out shoes to work, abandoning them, and then wearing new shoes from the factory back to the ghetto. They had both sold several pairs of new shoes and with the money had bought pistols, with which they hoped to join the partisans.

Lila, counting on her ability to pass as a non-Jew, sometimes left the ghetto to get food for the household. One day, when Rosa was waiting for Lila to return from the city, a neighbor came and said, "Your Lila was shot at the Jewish cemetery." Lila had been stopped in the city and asked for documents, which she did not have. She had admitted to being a Jew, had been taken to the Minsk prison, and then had been put in an open truck, which was taking Jews who had been caught in the city to be shot at the Jewish cemetery on the edge of the ghetto. People from the ghetto had seen her in the truck, wearing Rosa's coat and beating herself on the chest from fear. Rosa cried for a week for her friend. She felt that it was her fault that Lila had died, because sometime before this a friend of Lila's older sister (a doctor serving in the Red Army) had come to Lila in the ghetto and offered to take her out and hide her. Lila had said that she would leave only if Rosa could go too, but the woman could not take both of them, so Lila had remained in the ghetto.

In late October 1943 the Germans came to destroy the ghetto. On emerging from the outhouse in the courtyard and seeing that everyone had disappeared, Rosa realized that a pogrom was about to take place and ran to the house where she knew that her uncle Boris and cousin Lonya had participated in digging a malina. She knocked frantically on the window to the cellar. No one responded. She shouted that she knew they were there, and she would report them if they didn't let her in.

A man opened the window and pulled her inside. Under this cellar there was another cellar, and there was a box of sand on wheels that could be pulled over the entrance to the second cellar, hiding it. Rosa went down into the lower cellar, where she found Boris and Lonya, along with about thirty other people. When the pogrom began, they heard people break into the house, and then they heard the voices of Lithuanian policemen in the cellar above them. The Lithuanian policemen discovered the entrance to the lower cellar but had no time to go farther, so they blocked it by piling things on top of it and left. While the policemen were in the upper cellar, a three-year-old girl in the malina started to cry. Someone tried to stifle her cries by blocking her nose, and she died.

The people in the malina remained there for several days, and then the men began digging a tunnel to the surface. When the tunnel was complete, Lonya was sent out to go to Olga, tell her that Rosa was in the malina too, and ask for her help. Lonya brought back food and milk from Olga. Lonya explained to the others that Olga wanted Rosa to come to her, and that someone would come for the others later. Boris got out of the malina to help Rosa out, because after many days in the airless malina, without food, Rosa was unable to get out by herself. It was pitch dark. Boris, Lonya, and Rosa left the malina. Rosa was so weak that she had to crawl. They went to a house in the ghetto where they had been told to wait. As soon as it was light, Varvara arrived, and they set out with her for the village of Staroye Selo, in partisan territory, some twenty kilometers away. Varvara, who by this time had gained experience in getting past German checkpoints, had brought salt and spirits with her, and with the help of these bribes they reached Staroye Selo, where they found representatives of various partisan units. Lonya and Boris, who had brought their pistols, became fighters. Rosa spent the rest of the war working in a partisan hospital, taking care of the wounded. Just before the liberation of Minsk, Boris was killed in a battle with the Germans. Rosa and Lonya survived the war. Rosa returned to liberated Minsk, where she found her sister Lucia, who had just returned from another partisan unit.<sup>64</sup>

#### SAVING SOVIET CITIZENS

There was at least one underground group in Minsk that never made contact with the underground but operated on its own until its members left for the forest. Alexei Vasilievich Chernenko was a Red Army soldier

who was left behind in Byelorussia when the Germans invaded and his regiment retreated. Chernenko went to a village, where he became acquainted with a man who told Chernenko that he was a Communist. Chernenko acknowledged that he was a Communist also, and the two decided to go to Minsk to find more Communists and organize an underground group. They went to Minsk, organized a group, which apparently consisted of three men and two women, and began underground work. Most of the memoir that Chernenko wrote immediately after the war consists of a report on the work of this group. The first section of the report on the underground group describes its propaganda work: writing and circulating leaflets describing Red Army successes, and talking to people in order to persuade them to resist the Germans. The second section, entitled "Saving Soviet Citizens," describes the group's efforts to save the lives of Jews.<sup>65</sup>

When Chernenko arrived in Minsk, he writes, he met a Jewish woman, a Dr. Liakhovsky, who told him that the Germans had created a ghetto in which the Jews suffered terrible conditions, and that the Germans were conducting pogroms in the ghetto. Chernenko and his comrades decided to hide Jews, especially children, during the pogroms, and also to make false passports and pass the passports and food to Jews. Chernenko lists the names of children whom he and other members of his group hid in their apartments during pogroms and gives the name of one Jewish girl, Eva Kaufman, hidden in one of their flats for a year. Chernenko was in charge of producing false passports; one of these was given to Kaufman. One member of the group passed ten passports to the ghetto; another member did likewise, though Chernenko does not record the number of passports involved. Members of the group took food to a Jewish doctor and her children who were in hiding, and Chernenko took food to Jews employed in a workshop outside the ghetto. One member of the group fed Jews who worked near her house. Chernenko writes: "It was very difficult to help the Jews because the Germans killed those who helped them. But we risked our lives and saved (Dr.) Liakhovsky, (her son) Victor, Nina Uman, Bella Shilena, Yetik Shaikov, Roma Yakolich, and Arik Sharilo."

During the winter of 1943 Chernenko left for the partisans. The group never made contact with the underground organization in Minsk; it was, from beginning to end, a freelance operation. No one ordered or even encouraged these young men and women to do what they did. The memoir is unfortunately short on description; the reader is not told how

they found the particular people they did, how they got them out of the ghetto, or where the people they hid went after staying with members of the group. Chernenko's memoir makes it clear that, having been trapped in German-occupied territory, he did what he believed a Communist should do. Risking one's life to save Jews, or "Soviet citizens," was clearly part of his conception of what a Communist ought to do.



## Going to the Partisans

Sending as many Jews as possible to the forest was the central goal of the ghetto underground; going to the forest was also the personal goal of very large numbers of Jews in the ghetto who did not belong to the underground. This coincidence of aims gave the underground organization wide support within the ghetto population. The highest priority of the Minsk underground was to provide support for partisan units in the Minsk region; the partisans needed supplies and volunteers capable of fighting. Supplies were always welcomed, and the underground outside the ghetto often helped to transport supplies that came from the ghetto. Sending volunteers involved negotiation. Especially during the first year to year and a half of the war partisan units tended to be more engaged in securing their own physical survival in the forest than in conflict with the German forces; new members meant more mouths to feed, and more demand for a limited supply of weapons, unless the volunteers brought their own.

The formation of partisan groups in occupied Byelorussia was triggered by the German treatment of prisoners of war. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands of Red Army soldiers were cut off from the retreating Red Army and trapped in occupied territory. This happened to especially large numbers of soldiers in the vicinity of several cities, Minsk among them, that the Germans encircled. Word spread among the soldiers who did not manage to retreat with their units that if they were caught, they might be executed, and if not,

they were certain to be put in prisoner-of-war camps where conditions were so bad that many were dying. Thousands of soldiers hid in the villages, doing their best to blend in with the local population; some hid in Minsk. But hiding required obtaining civilian clothes, finding work, and hoping that no local would mention the presence of a stranger to a German soldier or a policeman. Most formed organized groups and went to the forests with the aim of surviving, perhaps of trying to get to the front and rejoin the Red Army, and if not, engaging in resistance in occupied territory.

In the spring and summer of 1942, what had been at first largely autonomous partisan groups began to form a coherent movement under Soviet leadership, and many shifted from what had at first been a relatively passive existence to armed conflicts with the German army. By this time large areas of the Byelorussian forests had come under partisan control; in some areas the partisans were in control at night, and the Germans during the day. The German army generally avoided entering partisan-controlled areas or challenging the partisans' nighttime control for fear of being killed. But during the second half of 1942 the Germans began attempting to gain control of these areas by engaging in blockades in which large numbers of German soldiers would encircle partisan-controlled areas and converge toward the center, killing all the partisans they could find. The partisans became adept at hiding under water, in swamps, while breathing through straws, or breaking through German lines and escaping. During these blockades the Germans attacked and burned down villages to destroy bases of support for the partisans.

During 1943 such blockades became more frequent. Hundreds of villages were destroyed, and their inhabitants killed. There were cases in which the Germans rounded up the inhabitants of villages within partisan territory, forced them into barns, and set the barns on fire. The Germans put little or no effort into winning over Byelorussian villagers; they took any suggestion of support, even forced support, for the partisans as justification for exterminating peasant households and communities. The partisans also killed those whom they took to be enemies among the peasants, but these were relatively few; their approach to the peasant population as a whole was to try to win their support.

At the time of the German invasion, some Byelorussian peasants had welcomed the Germans, thinking that German rule might be an improvement over Soviet rule. But few Byelorussian peasants shared the bitter hostility to the Soviets that the Germans may have expected, and which they did encounter among Ukrainian peasants. The war that the

Soviet leadership had waged against the kulaks, the prosperous class of peasants, and the famine that resulted from it had taken place in Ukraine, not Byelorussia. Byelorussia had never had many prosperous peasants; by the Soviet period, the vast majority of Byelorussian peasants were very poor; they lived on small plots of land on which they grew crops largely for their own consumption. Enthusiasm for Soviet rule was not widespread in the countryside, but neither was hatred of it. During the first year or so of the war most Byelorussian peasants had remained neutral in regard to the war. But as Germany brutality grew, so did Byelorussian hatred of the Germans.<sup>1</sup>

What had been at first a collection of largely autonomous partisan groups gradually jelled into a coherent movement, in part in response to growing German attacks, but primarily as a result of increasing Soviet control. From the beginning of the war, the Soviets had emphasized the need for a partisan movement; a headquarters of the Soviet Partisan Movement was established in Moscow, and Panteleimon K. Ponomarenko, First Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party, one of the Byelorussian Communist leaders who had fled in the first days of the war, was made Lieutenant General and appointed Chief of Staff of the Soviet Partisan Movement. The call for the formation of partisan units resonated with Soviet, and Russian, history. Partisans had helped to drive Napoleon's army out of Russia in 1812 and had played a major role in the Civil War of 1918-21.

In Byelorussia, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, people took it for granted that any defense of the homeland would involve partisan as well as regular military activity. It was widely assumed that the scattered partisan groups of the early months of the war would forge links with the Soviets, and that a Soviet-aligned partisan movement would grow. In fact, over approximately the first year of the war, the Soviets focused most of their efforts on establishing contact with and gaining control over partisan units near the front, while partisans in the more remote Minsk area were largely left on their own. But in the spring of 1942 a partisan command center was established deep in occupied Byelorussia, in the Lyuban swamps, more than one hundred kilometers south of Minsk. Regional and interregional headquarters were established. The Soviets began to supply weapons and other provisions and to mold partisan activity into a more or less unified movement under Soviet control. Partisan units acquired dual leadership structures: each unit now had a military commander and a political, party-appointed commissar.

The Soviets pressed the partisan movement to grow; existing units divided, and new units were created. During 1943 the partisan movement expanded rapidly. In addition to Jews from the Minsk ghetto and elsewhere, Byelorussian civilians, especially young men, were joining the partisans in growing numbers, fleeing German violence in the villages and German roundups of young people in the towns and cities to be sent to work in Germany. Byelorussia, with its extensive forests and its increasingly supportive population, became the center of the Soviet partisan movement (see map 3). Some partisan bases were located in pine forests, daunting to the Germans, but for Byelorussians accustomed to them relatively easy to move around in. Others were located in the pushcha, the huge expanses of dense, overgrown, primeval forest. With increasing Soviet control, the behavior of partisan units became on the whole more disciplined, though throughout the war there were incidents in which those who approached, hoping to join, were robbed or killed. Soviet pressure for an expanded partisan movement worked to the benefit of the ghetto underground, which earlier had to compete with underground groups outside the ghetto for very limited places in partisan units.

After the war, Hersh Smolar recalled discussions with other Jews in the partisan movement, including former leaders of the ghetto underground such as Chasya Pruslina and Boris Chaimovich, and liaisons to the ghetto, in which they agreed that more than 10,000 Jews from the ghetto had reached and been admitted into partisan units in the forest. About 5,400 returned to Minsk at the end of the war, he said; the rest fell in the struggle during the war.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, Smolar estimated, no more than 2,000 Jews had left the ghetto in groups organized by the ghetto underground.<sup>3</sup> Many of the approximately 8,000 who reached and were admitted to partisan units without the assistance of the underground fled from the ghetto in the spring and summer of 1943, when many partisan units, now being supplied with arms by the Soviets, were welcoming volunteers, and a number of partisan units in the Staroselsky Forest and elsewhere in the Koydanov region, west of Minsk, readily accepted refugees from the ghetto.

Those who fled the ghetto on their own did so with the indirect assistance of the underground and also, in most cases, with help from Byelorussians. They followed paths established through the joint efforts of the ghetto and city underground organizations. They were admitted into partisan units with ties to the Minsk underground, some of which had strong enough ties to the ghetto underground in particular to be sending liaisons

into the ghetto, and throughout the surrounding countryside, to bring Jews to partisan units. The journey from the ghetto to the forest was much more dangerous for those who left on their own than for those who went in groups sent by the underground. Ghetto survivors estimated that among those who left the ghetto for the forest on their own one out of three or four survived the journey. Most of those who made this journey successfully and were admitted into partisan units had the help of one or more Byelorussians along the way.

#### UNDERGROUND GROUPS SENT TO THE FOREST

According to information given to the ghetto underground by the Judenrat, as of March 1942 about 4,000 Jews had left the Minsk ghetto, either in groups organized by the underground or, in underground terminology, "privately."<sup>4</sup> The first underground groups to leave the ghetto did so not under the aegis of the ghetto underground organization, which was still in the process of being formed, but through contacts between members of the underground group in the ghetto formed by Nechama Ruditser and her family and friends, and Boris Chaimovich, and members of underground groups in the Russian district, including a group of former Red Army soldiers in hiding. Misha Ruditser, Nechama's brother, and his friend Fedya Shedletsky were serving as liaisons to a partisan unit in the Rudensk district, some forty kilometers south of Minsk, led by a man alternately called Captain Bystrov or Sergeev. Kazinietz, the emerging leader of the yet-to-be-formed Minsk underground, had appointed the two young men as liaisons. They had been introduced to Kazinietz by Danil Kudriakov, a former Red Army soldier in hiding in Minsk along with a group of his comrades. Misha soon joined the partisan unit; for some time, with the help of Kudriakov and others, Fedya continued to serve as a liaison, traveling between the ghetto, the Russian district, and the forest and conveying messages and leading groups to Sergeev's unit.

In early November 1941, Kudriakov and Ivan Kabushkin, a member of one of the underground groups in the Russian district, went to the ghetto, met with the Chaimovich/Ruditser group, and warned them to hide on November 7 from a German massacre in the ghetto; somehow they had learned of the Germans' plans for a pogrom that day. They also urged the group to organize thirty or forty trusted people to be sent to Sergeev's unit. Kudriakov promised to help by collecting weapons and ammunition and hiding them in the Kalvariskoye cemetery, not far from

the ghetto, along the route that a group from the ghetto would take toward Sergeev's unit. The members of the group hid in a well-concealed attic on November 7 and survived the pogrom. They proceeded to organize a group to leave the ghetto, and, meeting again, in late November, with Kudriakov and Kabushkin, they formulated a plan according to which those leaving the ghetto would be divided into two groups. The first group, leaving the ghetto in a truck with a false bottom, would leave the ghetto, meet Kudriakov, pick up the weapons, and proceed to the forest; the second group would follow in a second truck.

On the morning of December 10 two trucks left the ghetto, each carrying groups of people holding axes and other tools, and with passes indicating that they were workers on their way to cut wood in the forest. Misha was in one of the trucks, Fedya in the other. They picked up the weapons at the Kalvariskoye cemetery, and within several days both reached Captain Bystrov's unit; the two groups became the basis for a new unit under Captain Bystrov's command. On December 24 a third group, including people from the Russian district as well as the ghetto, was sent to Captain Bystrov's unit. Many in this third group were members of an underground group at a radio plant in the Russian district. Captain Bystrov had asked that this group contain people with medical skills, or at least people capable of gaining them. A group of eight women from the ghetto were included, some of them nurses, others to be trained as nurses. A truck from the radio plant arrived at the ghetto gate at an agreed-upon time, with Kudriakov, who was leading the group, and the workers from the plant inside it. Just as the women from the ghetto were getting into the truck several German soldiers approached; one of the radio plant workers threw the women into the truck roughly, as if he were a policeman hurrying Jews on their way to work. The man driving the truck was wearing a German uniform, so the truck was not stopped, and the group reached Captain Bystrov's base in the forest safely.<sup>5</sup>

During the early months of the war the German authorities may have been more concerned with the threat of an uprising among the approximately 100,000 prisoners of war in camps in and around Minsk than with resistance from civilians, whether from the city or the ghetto. German treatment of Soviet prisoners of war rivaled their treatment of Jews for brutality, especially in the first months of the war, before major pogroms took place in the ghetto. In early December 1941 the Germans marched thousands of starving and exhausted prisoners of war through the streets of Minsk, shooting those who stumbled or could not keep up the pace. For days the streets were littered with bodies. On the night of

January 3–4, 1942, the Germans arrested several hundred prisoners of war whom they accused of having planned an uprising coordinated among several prisoner-of-war camps in the Minsk area.<sup>6</sup> Many Minsk residents, including ghetto Jews, felt compassion for the emaciated and exhausted prisoners of war whom they often saw being driven through the streets in columns. Once a group of Byelorussian women, standing on the side of Nemiga Street across from the ghetto, threw potatoes to prisoners of war being marched down the street; when the prisoners of war reached for the potatoes, the German soldiers began shooting at them. Several women, watching the scene from inside the ghetto fence, saw a wounded prisoner of war crawl to the side of the road. They pointed to a place where there was a gap under the fence, and he crawled under it into the ghetto. The women took him to the Jewish Hospital, where he was registered as a Jew living in the ghetto, and treated. When he recovered, he was included in a group that was sent to a partisan unit.<sup>7</sup>

By the spring of 1942, the Germans had become aware not only of the existence of underground groups in the Russian district, but also that there was an underground organization in the ghetto, and that it was sending supplies and groups of Jews to partisan units in the forest. A German intelligence report of April 3, 1942, noted that there was an underground organization of 60 members in the ghetto, that the ghetto underground was sending money and weapons to the partisans, and that 60 to 80 Jews had been sent to partisan units in the forest.<sup>8</sup> A German intelligence report of May 9, 1942, noted: "The partisan movement has been financed mainly through contributions of money from the ghetto. [Our] investigation showed that almost the entire ghetto had been divided into divisions and subdivisions [in connection with underground activity]." This report also noted that thus far about 100 Jews had been sent out of the ghetto to partisan units in the forest.<sup>9</sup>

In this report at least, the Germans overestimated the ghetto's financial support for the partisans and badly underestimated the number of Jews who had left for the forest: according to the Judenrat, by this time 4,000, not 100, had left the ghetto. Nevertheless, this information impelled the Germans to put more effort into preventing Jews from leaving the ghetto and reaching the forest. The patrols around the ghetto were increased, and reinforcements were added to the ring of soldiers and police surrounding Minsk. The journey from the ghetto to the forest became more dangerous. But conditions inside the ghetto had also become more dangerous: the pogrom of March 2, 1942, convinced many Jews

that it was worth the danger entailed to leave for the forest. When the First City Committee was destroyed in the course of the mass arrests of underground members in late March and early April 1942, the ghetto underground accelerated its efforts to make contact with partisan units and establish its own bases. The Second City Committee, which was established in May, revived the partisan contacts of the previous committee and resumed working with the ghetto underground to send Jews to the forest. But it was no longer possible to confine contacts with the partisans to any one route. Some people left with the help of the City Committee, and some were sent by the ghetto underground to the units with which it was in contact.

#### ROUTES TO THE FOREST

In addition to organizing groups and sending them on foot to the forest, the ghetto underground found at least two avenues of escape that could be used repeatedly, in both of which Byelorussians played key roles. After the pogrom of March 2, 1942, increasing numbers of Jews wanted to leave the ghetto, but the Military Council's reluctance to include them among those whom it was sending to the forest forced the ghetto underground to look for other routes. Fyodor Kuznetzov, the head of an underground group of railway workers in the Russian district, offered to take groups of Jews to the forest by train. According to the plan that was agreed upon, a train approaching the railway station just outside the city would slow down, and the engineer would wave his hand. A group of Jews, waiting beside the tracks, would climb into the coal wagon and the locomotive, and the train would again pick up speed. The train, whose route lay through the partisan forest, would slow down at a designated place, alongside a dense wood, where partisan guides were waiting. The Jews would jump off the train, and the train would pick up speed and continue on its way. About 500 Jews were sent to the forest in this way.<sup>10</sup>

Another special route to the forest was established by a group of supposed "mischlinge," young Jews who had persuaded the Germans that they were of mixed parentage, and who were therefore allowed to lead groups of Jews out of the ghetto to work, and from one workplace to another, in the city. The documents that they carried, and the white ribbons that they wore on their sleeves, also gave them the right to live outside the ghetto, or, in the case of those who lived in the ghetto, to stay overnight in the city. A group of "mischlinge" joined the ghetto underground and led groups of Jews out of the ghetto and to the forest. The



efforts of a Byelorussian, a member of the city underground, whom we know only by his first name, Volodya, were crucial to this effort. Eventually the Germans discovered the underground activities of the group of “mischlinge,” and almost all of those who had not yet gone to the forest were arrested and killed. We see this story through the eyes of Reuven Liond, the sole survivor among those involved in this effort; he escaped to the forest after the project was discovered.

Reuven Liond had come to Minsk from Alshan, a town on the Polish side of the Byelorussian/Polish border.<sup>11</sup> When the war began, he was twenty-four years old, a member of the Marxist-Zionist youth organization Hashomer Hatzair. Apprehensive about what life would be like under the Germans, he decided to follow the retreating Red Army into the Soviet Union. His mother gave him the address of an uncle in Minsk. Reuven and several of his friends left by bicycle and reached the Polish/Soviet border. A border guard forbade them to go farther, and many of them turned back. But Reuven and one friend crossed the border unnoticed and continued on. Once having crossed the border, they were dismayed to see German soldiers and to realize that the Germans had crossed the border as well. Nevertheless, they continued on. When they approached Minsk and were told that the Germans had already taken the city, they bypassed it. They were stopped by Germans on the road and were taken back to Minsk, not as Jews but as part of the male population that the Germans were registering, and were taken to Drozdy. In the confusion of the registration process, the two young men managed to escape. At this point Reuven's friend decided that there was no advantage in suffering German rule in the Soviet Union when he could suffer the same thing at home. He turned back. Reuven continued into the ghetto and found the address that his mother had given him. His uncle was in the Red Army, but his aunt, Temma Kozlovsky, took him in.

In the ghetto, Reuven found a friend from his hometown, Chaim Kolnitsansky, who, like Reuven, had fled eastward and was now living with his nephew, David Baran, a Minsk native. Chaim was a “mischling,” the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father. David's appearance was not stereotypically Jewish, and thus he had been able to convince the Germans that he belonged to this category as well. As a result both Chaim and David carried documents that enabled them to lead groups of Jews out of the ghetto to work or from one workplace to another in the city, and also to remain outside the ghetto at night. In addition to his job as a column leader, Chaim was working for the Germans as a barber at the railway station. Reuven had previously worked as a barber and

had brought the tools of his trade with him to Minsk. Chaim took Reuven to work with him and introduced his friend as a Byelorussian. Reuven convinced the Germans that he was Byelorussian by speaking only Byelorussian and never appearing to understand any German. As a worker at the barbershop, Reuven acquired a document identifying him as a Byelorussian by the name of Roman Adolfovich Liondov, who worked for the Germans.

Reuven and Chaim became close friends, and Chaim revealed to Reuven, in deepest secrecy, that his nephew and housemate David had connections with the underground and also with the partisans. Chaim said that he hoped to develop such connections also. He realized that this would be difficult, because members of the ghetto underground, like the ghetto population as a whole, distrusted "Westerners" and especially Jews from Poland, due to the collaboration of several Polish Jews whom the Germans had placed in the Judenrat. But Chaim was already helping David with his underground work and hoped eventually to develop connections with the partisans as well. He promised to do what he could to involve Reuven in the work of the underground.

Sometime after this conversation took place, Chaim took Reuven to see David, who told him that the underground wanted him to take a new job as doorman in one of the buildings of the General Commissariat, the German headquarters in Minsk. The building, which was near the General Commissariat, contained shoemaking and other workshops that the Germans had established for their own use, and also a labor office, analogous to the Labor Exchange in the ghetto, where work assignments were made, and work passes were filled out and distributed among Byelorussians employed by the Germans. German officials often entered the building; the doorman's job was to hold the door open for them. This position had until recently been filled by a Jew, but the Germans had decided that it was inappropriate for a Jew to open the door for high-ranking German officials, and had fired him. They were looking for a Byelorussian to take the job. David pointed out that Reuven's Byelorussian document would enable him to replace the Jew who had occupied this position, and Reuven took the job. Soon after this the Germans decided to add a barbershop to the workshops in this building. Chaim took a job in the new barbershop, located near the labor office. Reuven, when he was not busy opening the door for German dignitaries, worked with Chaim in the barbershop.

Reuven meanwhile was looking for opportunities to make some money in the hope of saving enough to buy a weapon, which would

enable him to join the partisans should the opportunity to do so arise. Several Jews from Germany, who lived in the ghetto-within-a-ghetto for German Jews, worked in the courtyard of the General Commissariat, cutting wood, and Reuven became acquainted with one of them, a man named Max. One day Reuven suggested to Max that if he or any of his acquaintances wanted to exchange items for food, Max could bring the items to Reuven, who would exchange them for food at a market in the city on his way to work. Max seized upon the suggestion and began bringing things to Reuven: items of clothing, watches, jewelry. At first Reuven took only some of the food in payment for his work; later he began to take money as well and save it toward acquiring a weapon.

Reuven's work as a go-between, taking the items that Max brought him to the market and selling them, did eventually enable him to buy a weapon. It also occurred to Reuven that his business might enable him to make a connection with the secretary in the office of the German labor department. The distribution of labor in Minsk was overseen by a Lieutenant Shtamp, and by his assistant, a civilian engineer, Hening. Shtamp visited the office occasionally, and Hening did so more regularly, but most of the time the only person in the office was Hening's daughter, who worked as his secretary. There were always blank work permits lying on her desk; sometimes Shtamp and Hening signed them before they were filled out, sometimes afterwards. The secretary's job was to type in the description of the job, the name of the work supervisor, and the number of workers and to stamp the passes with the German eagle and swastika. The stamp that she used for this purpose was kept in a small locked cabinet on the wall of her office. Occasionally people came to Reuven and asked him to intercede with the secretary to extend their work permits; when she did what he asked, Reuven would give her a little gift, a piece of jewelry, from his business. He began selling her things and asking her what she would like him to get for her. He took care to maintain the fiction that he did not understand German, and used this to his advantage, by appearing not to have quite understood what she had said, and then bringing her something similar to what she had asked for, but not exactly what she wanted. These feigned misunderstandings, and the need to correct them, gave Reuven an excuse to enter the office of the labor department frequently. He noticed that sometimes the secretary left the office for periods of time, and sometimes, when she went out, she would forget to lock the door behind her.

Reuven's efforts to promote a relationship with the secretary were prompted not only by his desire to help people who needed work

permits. More important, Reuven and Chaim had been assigned by the underground to steal work permits that could be used to take Jews out of the ghetto and to the forest. Whenever Reuven went to the labor office and found that the secretary was not there but had left the door open, he would call Chaim, who would stand watch while Reuven unlocked the cabinet, removed the stamp, stamped a number of work passes, returned the stamp to the cabinet, locked it, and put the key back in its place. Reuven and Chaim did this frequently and were never interrupted. They transmitted more work passes to the underground than it was able to use. The stamp on these documents was original and accurate and not open to question. Some of the forms that they took already carried Shtamp and Hening's signatures; in other cases the signatures were later forged. The documents were made out to specify the number of people being taken to work in the forest, the names of the driver and the column leader, the make of the truck, and other details. Most of the documents that the underground used were fakes, and the forgeries could be detected, especially if badly done. The documents that Reuven and Chaim had acquired were genuine.

By this time Chaim's nephew, David, along with Elisha Narushevitz, another member of the ghetto underground, had become the leaders of a group of "mischlinge" who worked for the Germans leading columns of Jews out of the ghetto, and who belonged to the underground. Some of them actually were the products of mixed marriages, while others were not but had nevertheless convinced the Germans that they belonged in this category.

With the documents that Reuven and Chaim had provided, the "mischlinge" column leaders began taking groups of Jews to the forest. Those going to the forest were equipped with weapons, which were hidden under the truck, and with tools for cutting wood, which they carried. Early in the morning, when working columns were forming to leave the ghetto, a Byelorussian named Volodya would drive a truck belonging to the General Commissariat into the ghetto and pick up a group of Jews who were waiting for him. Narushevitz, as column leader, would sit in the cabin next to Volodya, who would drive his passengers forty kilometers south of Minsk to a prearranged place where they would be met by a courier from Lapidus's partisan unit. Volodya and Narushevitz would then return to Minsk, and Narushevitz would go back into the ghetto. After several journeys Narushevitz remained with the partisans. Volodya continued picking up groups of Jews in the ghetto and taking them to the forest. Other column leaders accompanied these groups, sitting next to

Volodya in the truck's cabin, and stayed in the forest with them; David Baran was among those who joined the partisans in this way. But Volodya was now in charge. Only he knew where and when people would be waiting for him in the ghetto; through his partisan contacts, he continued to arrange for the groups to be met by couriers in the forest. The journeys to the forest continued through the late winter and early spring of 1941-42.

One night in April 1942, Chaim and Reuven slept in their workplace rather than returning to the ghetto, and in the morning they met Volodya and drove into the ghetto with him, carrying the appropriate documents, and picked up a group of Jews. Chaim sat in the cabin with Volodya, and Reuven remained in the back. Reuven got out of the truck before it left the city. He went to an underground apartment in the city to report that the mission had been successful. That evening, after work, he returned to the underground apartment, where underground members were anxiously awaiting Volodya's return. Late that evening Volodya arrived and reported that he had taken his passengers to the place where they were to be met by a partisan courier, but that the courier had not arrived, because a German action was taking place in the area. The group had decided to remain in the forest and look for a connection with partisans. On the fourth day after the group had left, a member of the group, a seventeen year old named Chayeleya Raya, returned to Minsk and described what had happened. For two days the group had looked for partisan units, with no success. They decided to send several people back to the city to make connections with representatives of partisan units who arrived in Minsk from time to time, and with whom the underground would connect them. Three of the group had left for the city: Chayeleya Raya, Chaim, and a man named Dunar. On the road, they encountered German soldiers, who did not believe their documents, and arrested them. The soldiers watched Chayeleya Raya less carefully than the two men, perhaps because she was female and looked younger than her age, or because her appearance was not characteristically Jewish. She escaped and continued on to Minsk.

A few days later Chaim and Dunar were brought to Minsk. They were taken to the work office of the General Commissariat, where it was discovered that some of the documents that Chaim held were forged. The two men were taken to the Minsk prison. Other column leaders were arrested. Dunar was taken to a square in Minsk, where he was forced to sit on a bench for an entire day, surrounded by members of the Gestapo, dressed in civilian clothes. Anyone who greeted him was arrested. While

these arrests were taking place, Volodya disappeared. Reuven left for the forest with emissaries from a partisan unit who were in Minsk at the time. Reuven later was told that Chaim had not given the Germans the names of any of his underground comrades. He was hung in one of the public squares of Minsk on May 9, along with many other underground members.<sup>12</sup>

#### “PRIVATE” FLIGHTS TO THE FOREST

Those who left the ghetto for the forest “privately,” in the terminology of the underground—that is, without the underground’s help—left the ghetto without trained guides and often lacked the false documents and weapons that the underground was often able to supply to those who left under its aegis. Nevertheless, many who fled on their own did manage to get through the German encirclement of Minsk, arrive in the forest, and gain acceptance by partisan units. Some managed to reach partisan units on their own, without any help. This was, for instance, the experience of Mira Ruderman and her father and brother, which was described in chapter 1. But others tried and returned to the ghetto one or more times before succeeding, and in many cases help along the way was a factor in their success.

Abram Ilich Rosovsky (who met and married Mira Ruderman after the war) was seventeen years old when the war began, and one of a group of four boys and two girls, all between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, who managed to gather arms in the ghetto (see fig. 17). The girls worked in a warehouse where arms were stored, and managed to bring parts of rifles back to the ghetto with them. The boys would go under the wire fence to meet them when they came back from work, and would take the rifle parts from the girls so that they could go through the checkpoint at the ghetto gate without contraband on them. The boys, meanwhile, would take the rifle parts back under the fence and into the ghetto.

In April 1943, Abram found out that a partisan guide, a boy of fifteen or sixteen, often visited a family that he knew in the ghetto. Abram managed to meet the guide and persuaded him to take Abram and his friends to the partisans. Early one morning, eleven teenagers left the ghetto, including Abram, the partisan guide, and others, mostly girls, some from the original group as well as some others. They had managed to go only a few kilometers along the road that led to the west, out of Minsk, before encountering a German unit. Everyone in the group was caught except Abram, who went to the side of the road and hid under a bridge



Figure 17. Abram Rosovsky.  
Photograph courtesy of Raissa  
A. Chernoglazova and the  
Belarusian State Museum  
of Film, Phono, and Photo  
Documents.

while the others were brought back to the ghetto; they were shot in the Jewish cemetery. Abram, hiding under the bridge, could hear the shots. When he came out onto the street, he met a Byelorussian woman, who advised him not to go any farther. She told him that the Germans knew that one member of the group had escaped, and there was an ambush ahead, waiting for him. Abram went back to the ghetto.

Of the two girls who worked in the arms warehouse, only one had been among those who had left the ghetto and been captured; the other continued bringing arms and grenades to the ghetto. One day she didn't return to the ghetto. Abram never saw her again. By this time he had two grenades and a sawed-off rifle. He gathered another group of young people and, through a contact that the first partisan guide had given him, got in touch with another guide, who agreed to lead Abram and his group to the forest. The group, consisting of three boys, among them the partisan guide, and one girl, left the ghetto by joining a column of workers. Once they were outside the ghetto, they tore off their yellow patches and left the column. At that moment three young boys, about twelve years old, joined them, so there were now seven of them. They walked along the road with the guide ahead and the others following, one by one, with enough distance between them so that they would not be seen as a group, but close enough that each one could keep an eye on the one ahead.

Along the way, a woman stopped Abram and asked, in a friendly way, if he was a Jew. When he said that he was, she warned him that there were German soldiers a short distance ahead, checking the documents of everyone who passed by. He signaled to his companions to stop. The woman showed them a path that they could take through the forest to bypass the checkpoint. They took it and passed the checkpoint safely.

In the forest, thirty or forty kilometers from Minsk, they met a group of partisans, who asked Abram and his group to show them their arms. That night, the partisans came back and demanded not only their arms, but also their clothes. The head of the partisan group, claiming that Abram and his companions were spies from the ghetto, ordered three of the partisans to take them into the woods and shoot them. But as they were going into the woods, one of the partisans approached Abram and asked him what school he had attended, and the two discovered that they had gone to the same school. The partisan said to Abram, "We will go into the woods and shoot into the air, and you must run away. We will come back and tell the commander that we fulfilled the order." The partisans shot into the air, and Abram and the others ran away; somehow, in the confusion, the partisan guide disappeared, along with two other members of the group. Those who were left, three boys, including Abram, and one girl, were naked, without arms, and, with the disappearance of the partisan guide, they no longer had a connection to a partisan unit.

When the partisans had donned the clothes that they stole from the Jews, they had thrown their own old clothes aside; the young people from the ghetto put these clothes on and continued on their way. But they had no idea where to go. They were, by this time, deep in partisan territory, and they met many partisans, but none wanted to take them, explaining that they could not take those who brought no weapons. The fact that Abram and his companions were Jews was no doubt also a factor. One day they met a group from a Ukrainian unit that agreed to take one of their members, a redheaded boy who did not have typically Jewish features, but not the others. For three months, they wandered through the countryside. Fortunately it was summer; they slept in the open and got food by working for peasants who needed extra hands on their farms. Finally, they met a group of four or five partisans riding horses, one of whom was a secretary of the Minsk regional committee of the Communist Party and, as Abram later found out, a Jew. He asked them if they were searching for the partisans, and when they said that



they were, he wrote an order to the commander of the Third Minsk Brigade that they were to be accepted. Abram and the two others were accepted into the Budyonni Brigade, led by Semyon Ganzenko, in the late summer of 1943.<sup>13</sup>

#### SEMYON GANZENKO AND ZORIN'S BRIGADE

Several months earlier, Mira Ruderman and her father and brother had also been accepted into the Budyonni Brigade, arriving from the ghetto, like Abram and his companions, without arms. Mira, whose story is told in chapter 1, had thought that it was a possible family connection that had led Ganzenko to accept her and her family, since their family name, Ruderman, was the same as that of Ganzenko's partner, Fanya, a young woman from the Minsk ghetto whom he had met in the partisan unit. But there was another side to Ganzenko's story, which Mira was not aware of when she entered Ganzenko's partisan base. Ganzenko was one of many non-Jewish prisoners of war who had been rescued from the Germans by the ghetto underground.

The Shirokaya prisoner-of-war camp, so called because of its location on Shirokaya Street, on the outskirts of Minsk, was one of the many places in the city where the ghetto underground had had a presence, in this case until the summer of 1943. Through its contacts in the Labor Exchange, the underground had obtained jobs for a number of underground members in the camp. Sonya Kurlandskaya worked as secretary and translator for the head of the camp, a young man named Gorodiet-ski who took delight in leading murderous raids in the ghetto.<sup>14</sup> Other Jews employed in the camp, including underground members and others connected to the underground, carried out more menial tasks, including finding food and bringing it to the camp and removing garbage. Ghetto underground members Sarah Levina and Sophia Sadovskaya, who did not work in the Shirokaya camp but had connections with the city underground, helped Sonya Kurlandskaya plan the escapes of groups of prisoners of war. Meanwhile, a member of the Byelorussian underground, Alexander Demyentyev, worked to expand the underground's contacts inside the prison by frequenting the canteen in the city where prisoners of war who worked for the Germans were taken for lunch and cultivating contacts with them.<sup>15</sup> Through the efforts of Kurlandskaya and others, several groups of prisoners of war were sent out of the camp to partisan units.<sup>16</sup>

On April 24, 1942, Nahum Feldman, a leader of the ghetto underground, led a group of twenty-five Jews out of the ghetto to the Staroselsky Forest, west of Minsk. The partisan unit that Feldman and his group had intended to join refused to accept them. Feldman and his group established their own base. Byelorussians, arriving in the forest, joined Feldman's group. Conflicts broke out over who should become the group's commander. Feldman sent a message to the ghetto underground asking that someone with military experience and credentials be sent to the forest to command the group.

Members of the ghetto underground in the Shirokaya camp had discovered that there was a former Red Army lieutenant, Semyon Ganzenko, among the prisoners, and they decided to get him out of the camp. In late May 1942, underground members in charge of taking garbage out of the camp put Ganzenko and several other prisoners of war in barrels of garbage, with straws to breathe through, placed the barrels in a truck, and drove the truck out of the camp. At a prearranged place they were met by a partisan forest guide, eighteen-year-old Tanya Lifshitz, a member of the ghetto underground who had left the ghetto to become a liaison and forest guide for the partisans. She led the men to the Staroselsky Forest, where they joined Feldman's group. Ganzenko became the commander and Feldman the commissar of the Budyonni otryad, which grew to become a brigade. With Ganzenko's arrival, connections with Minsk, including the Minsk ghetto, were strengthened; groups sent by both the city and the ghetto underground organizations continued to arrive.<sup>17</sup>

In the late winter and early spring of 1943 the numbers of people fleeing the ghetto grew; groups of ghetto refugees camped out in villages in partisan territory, hoping to find a partisan unit that would take them, or wandered in the forest. By this time there were substantial numbers of Minsk Jews in the Budyonni Brigade and in other partisan units in the Staroselsky Forest, and a number of Jews from the Minsk ghetto underground had risen to positions of leadership in these units. It had become clear that the Red Army would win; it was equally clear that the Germans would destroy the Minsk ghetto before retreating. In early 1943 Sholem Zorin, a Minsk Jew and a member of the Budyonni Brigade, asked Ganzenko's permission to create a large "family detachment" for noncombatant Jews. He proposed that the refugees from the ghetto who were wandering around the forest with no place to go be gathered and placed in such a unit for protection, and that more be brought out of the ghetto and placed in it as well.<sup>18</sup> Hersh Smolar, now a member of

another brigade in the Staroselsky Forest, and Nahum Feldman, commissar of the Budyonni Brigade, met with Ganzenko and supported Zorin's request, pointing out that the ghetto was on the verge of destruction.

Ganzenko held a meeting with his staff to discuss the question. The next morning he called a meeting of all the partisans in his unit and announced that the Budyonni Brigade would create a special base in the forest to which as many Jews from the Minsk ghetto as possible would be brought. Sholem Zorin would be the commander of the new unit. Five members of the Budyonni Brigade, he said, would be assigned to organize the base and would become the core of the armed group that would protect it; others, from the ghetto, would be added to this unit. The Budyonni Brigade, Ganzenko added, would donate fifteen rifles for the use of the armed group that would be attached to the new unit.<sup>19</sup>

By the spring of 1943 the Byelorussian partisan movement in the area west of Minsk was directed by a regional center in Baranovich, headed by Major General "Platon" (Vasili Chernychov). Ganzenko no doubt checked with regional partisan authorities before deciding to establish a unit for the protection of Jews who could not fight; to make such a decision without permission from above would have been virtually unthinkable. The idea of a large family camp, protected by a small fighting unit, inverted the usual relationship between a fighting unit and a small camp consisting of the fighters' relatives, who followed the fighting unit and served its needs. The anomalous new unit was given the official title of Special Detachment No. 106 and came to be informally called Zorin's Brigade. After the new unit was established, German attacks in the area escalated. German soldiers surrounded one village in the area, seized thirty people who had just arrived from the ghetto and were on their way to Zorin's Brigade, put them in barns along with several local farmers, and set the barns on fire. In response to pleas from Zorin and others, Platon agreed to move the brigade farther west, to the Naliboki swamp, an area that German soldiers were less likely to enter.<sup>20</sup>

According to Soviet records, Zorin's detachment included 558 people, of whom 137 were members of the brigade's armed unit. Of these, 121 were men, and 16 were women. The other 421 were unarmed people: children, old people, and women who could not fight. The unit included 557 Jews; the armed unit included 1 Byelorussian. But the detachment was apparently larger than this. Smolar, who helped organize it, wrote that it consisted of around 500 people when it was formed, but that more refugees from the ghetto kept arriving and that it soon came to include more than 600 people, either as noncombatants or as fighters.<sup>21</sup> According

to Moishe Kaganovich's history of Jews in the Soviet partisan movement, Zorin's detachment included more than 700 people.<sup>22</sup> Hinda Tassman, who was a member of the brigade, wrote that it continued to grow, even after it moved to the Naliboki forest. A school was organized, she wrote, which was attended by hundreds of children.<sup>23</sup> Members of the unit supported other partisan units by producing shoes and clothing and operating a bakery, laundry, and hospital. Zorin's detachment survived the war virtually intact, though some of its fighters were killed in a battle with the Germans toward the end of the war, in which Zorin was also wounded.<sup>24</sup>

#### A CHAIN OF RESCUES

By the spring of 1943, when Zorin's family unit was formed, most members of the ghetto underground who had survived this long had left the ghetto and were in the forest. Sarah Goland and several other women underground members remained in the ghetto, organizing groups and sending them to the forest. But over the spring months each of these women received instructions from her partisan contacts to leave the ghetto for the forest, and did so. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of people were fleeing the ghetto, despite increased patrols around the ghetto fence, and the tightened ring of German checkpoints on roads leading out of Minsk. The dangers of fleeing the ghetto were particularly great if one did not know where to go to find partisans. By this time many people had left the ghetto for partisan units, but few had returned to the ghetto to tell others where to go. Those who left the ghetto without the help of the underground were in most cases striking out on their own, and many left without weapons.

In the spring of 1943 the chances of ghetto Jews being admitted to partisan units began to improve as support from the Soviet partisan movement, especially its donations of weapons, made it possible for many partisan units to welcome large numbers of new members, including those who arrived without arms. Jews who joined partisan units now had more opportunity than they had earlier to go back to the ghetto to bring out family members and friends. Many of those whom they brought back with them or who were inspired by their example to flee the ghetto on their own were too old, too young, or too weakened by life in the ghetto to become fighters. But Zorin and Ganzenko, and also Jewish leaders from several other partisan units, were looking for candidates for Zorin's new unit. Couriers were being sent through the forest to find Jews who had fled the ghetto; forest guides, mostly children and teenagers from the

ghetto, were being sent into the ghetto to bring more people out. Leaders of the partisan units connected to the ghetto were looking for refugees who could be trained as guides and sent back to get more people. Some young people from the ghetto had the courage to return to the ghetto repeatedly and lead groups to the forest. Others who did not think that they had that much courage discovered under pressure that they did.

Yocheved Rubenchik was fifteen years old, and her cousin Hinda Nechamchik (later Tassman) eleven, when the Germans invaded Minsk. The Rubenchik and Nechamchik families, and also the family of Rivka Rubenchik, an aunt of both of the girls, lived on the same alley, Green Street, in the densely Jewish-populated neighborhood that became the ghetto. On the night of November 4, 1941, four days before the first major pogrom in the ghetto, four members of the SS knocked on the door and then broke into the house before the family was able to hide. They killed Hinda's parents and her six siblings. Hinda was saved by her father, who, when he was shot, intentionally fell on her, thus hiding her small body from the Germans. Hinda's cousin Hershl, Yocheved's younger brother, was with them at the time and managed to survive by hiding under the stove. After the Germans left, Hinda, not realizing that her cousin was still alive, ran to the house of her aunt Rivka, who took her in. She continued to live with her aunt and uncle until she escaped from the ghetto, many months later, with the help of her cousin Yocheved.

Yocheved, like Hinda, was a member of a large family, the eldest of seven siblings. When the war began, the youngest was a baby, and the next three were still small. Yocheved's mother, Nechama, stayed home to take care of the smaller children, while Yocheved, her father Israel, and her brothers Hershl and Abram worked outside the ghetto. Yocheved worked at one of the three brick factories situated on the western edge of Minsk. When the Great Pogrom of July 28–31, 1942, began, Yocheved, her brother Hershl, and her cousin Hinda were all at work at the brick factory; Yocheved's father and her brother Abram were at work elsewhere. Mother Nechama and the four younger children were at home, in the ghetto. Nechama, carrying the baby, ran toward a malina, with the three children following her. But German soldiers appeared, and the children ran in a different direction, down another street. Nechama proceeded to the malina, where she and the baby hid, along with many others. After five days, thinking the pogrom was over, Nechama emerged from the malina with the baby in her arms; someone, a soldier or policeman, fired at them and killed the baby. Nechama searched for her

other children but did not find them. When Yocheved returned to the ghetto, she found that her mother's hair had gone white.

Yocheved also lost her brother Hershl during this pogrom. When the workday was over, on the first day of the pogrom, the Jews working at the brick factory, including Yocheved, Hinda, and Hershl, were put in an open truck and driven back to the ghetto. Seeing the streets of the ghetto empty of people, but littered with broken furniture, torn bedding, and clothes, the detritus of the pogrom, they believed that they were being taken to be killed. Yocheved and Hinda urged Hershl to jump out of the truck and run away. "You are blond," Yocheved said to him. "Run to the goyim. Perhaps you will remain alive." It turned out that the truck was being driven through the ghetto and beyond it, to a camp where Jews working for the Germans were kept for the duration of the pogrom. Yocheved and Hinda never saw Hershl again.

At the brick factory, Yocheved had become acquainted with a Byelorussian woman, Natasha Shunaiko, who lived nearby. Natasha argued that Yocheved should not go back to the ghetto but should flee to the partisans instead, and Yocheved tried to persuade what remained of her family that this was the best course. But her father opposed this, arguing that they would be killed on the way to the forest. "Why should we seek death? Let death seek us instead," he said. Yocheved's mother, who was accustomed to supporting her husband's decisions, agreed with him. But Yocheved did not give up her intention of going to the forest. Natasha told Yocheved that representatives of partisan units often visited the village of Staroye Selo. She gave Yocheved directions to the village, and also the address of a sister who lived there. She assured Yocheved that if she were to mention Natasha's name, the sister would put her up while Yocheved looked for the partisans. Yocheved tried to convince her friend Fanya Kaplan to go with her. At first Fanya refused, because her boyfriend, Lonya, was afraid to go, and Fanya did not want to leave him. Finally, Yocheved told Fanya that she had seen Lonya with another girl. This was not true, but it convinced Fanya to agree to leave the ghetto with Yocheved (see fig. 18).

Fanya and Yocheved left for the forest from the brick factory on March 2, 1943. They arrived safely in Staroye Selo, but Natasha's sister refused to take them in. As they were sitting by the side of the river that ran past the village, considering what to do next, a Byelorussian man approached, greeted them in a friendly way, and asked if they were Jews. Fania denied it and claimed that they were Byelorussian women. She asked who he was, and he said he was a partisan. Yocheved interrupted



Figure 18. Yocheved Rubenchik and Fanya Kaplan. Reproduced by permission from Abram Rubenchik, *Pravda o Minskoy Geto* (The Truth about the Minsk Ghetto) (Tel Aviv: Krugozor [Prospect], 1999) 91.

to acknowledge that she and Fanya were Jews. “Either take us or kill us here, because we have nowhere to go,” she said. The partisan, who they later discovered was a local man, from Staroye Selo, said that he would take them to his comrades in a camp outside the nearby village of Ptich. He took them to a house in that village and ordered the woman who lived there to feed them and let them stay. The next day the partisan took them to a nearby partisan unit, but the commander of the unit was willing to take them only if Fanya would agree to be his wife, an offer that she refused. They returned to Ptich, and the woman who had put them up the night before agreed to do so again. The next morning they heard voices outside: two Jewish partisans from Minsk had come to get them. It turned out that the Byelorussian partisan had gotten word to Nahum Feldman, now the commissar of the Budyonni partisan unit, that there were two Jewish girls in Ptich who were seeking to join the partisans, and Feldman had sent two boys from his unit to get them. One of them, it turned out, was an acquaintance of Fanya’s, a friend of her brother’s. The two girls got in the wagon in which the boys had come for them, were taken to a partisan base, and accepted into the unit.

A month or so after reaching the partisan unit, Yocheved decided that it was time to go back to the ghetto and get her family. In the ghetto Yocheved had known a girl named Yeva who also worked at the brick fac-

tory and who had taken a German soldier as her lover. Yocheved had reproved Yeva for this, but Yeva had argued that first of all the soldier was not German, but a Belgian, and that furthermore he was different than other German soldiers, that he treated her well, brought her food, and had promised to go to the partisans with her. Yocheved told the commander of her partisan unit about this and suggested that she and Fanya be permitted to back to the ghetto and bring Yeva and her soldier boyfriend back with them. The soldier, Yocheved pointed out, would no doubt bring his gun, and the partisans would have a useful prisoner. Yocheved and Fanya were given permission to return to the ghetto. They returned to Minsk, waited until dusk, and went through the fence. Once inside the ghetto they agreed to meet at Yocheved's house the next day. Fanya went to get her sister. Yocheved, arriving home, told her family that she had arrived from the partisans and would take them with her the next day. Yocheved's father refused to go, but her mother and her brother Abram began to prepare for the journey. Yocheved's eleven-year-old cousin Hinda was in the house at the time. She burst into tears and announced that she did not want to be left behind. Yocheved promised to take her along. Yocheved's aunt Rivka Rubenchik was invited to go as well, but her husband refused to go.

As Rivka wrote in her memoir after the war, others had left the ghetto before Yocheved and Fanya. Some of them, members of the underground, returned and took people to the forest with them, but for those who were not connected to the underground it was as if they had dropped into the sea.<sup>25</sup> When Yocheved and Fanya came back to the ghetto with news of where the partisans could be found, word spread. Yocheved described to her family the route that they would take the next day to get to partisan territory. She sent her thirteen-year-old brother Abram to the little market that functioned illegally, and intermittently, in the ghetto, to get salt, cigarettes, and matches to take to the partisans. At the market Abram met several friends. He told them that Yocheved had come and that he was going to the partisans with her. He described the route. Meanwhile, Yocheved went to find Yeva. Yeva said that she was no longer seeing the soldier (and if she had been, she said, she would never be such a fool as to take him to the partisans with her). Yocheved decided to take Yeva to the forest anyway so that she could explain to the partisans that there really had been a soldier boyfriend. This, Yocheved thought, might save her from the wrath of the partisans when she returned to the forest with women and children from her family, but no soldier.

Yeva insisted on taking her mother with her. She went to her mother's house. On the way, she met two friends. Speaking to them



more circumspectly than Abram had to his friends, Yeva told them that she had heard a rumor that one could reach the partisans if one followed a certain route out of the city. Yeva continued to her mother's house and told her mother that they were leaving for the partisans. Her mother boiled a pot of water, and after washing in preparation for their trip, the two went to Yocheved's house. Yeva's two friends dropped in to see Yeva at her mother's house, found a pot of still-warm water and Yeva and her mother gone. They concluded that what Yeva had described as a rumor was more than a rumor, and they began preparing to leave. Abram's friends were doing the same. Yeva's friends and Abram's friends arrived in Staroye Selo soon after the arrival of the group that Yocheved and Fanya took out of the ghetto. Word spread through the ghetto that Yocheved had come back from the partisans to take people to the forest, and that partisan territory could be reached if one followed a certain route. Many people left the ghetto, followed these instructions, and arrived in Staroye Selo.

The group that gathered at Yocheved's house to go to the partisans included Yocheved, her mother, her brother Abram, her cousin Hinda, and her aunt Rivka, Yeva and her mother, and Fanya and her mother and sister. Fanya had returned to the ghetto partly to get her mother and sister, and partly because she missed Lonya and wanted to take him to the partisans. But it turned out that Lonya had been killed during the time that Fanya and Yocheved had been with the partisans. There had been an explosion at the factory where he worked, and though it had been caused by an accident, the Germans had blamed it on the Jews and had shot all the Jews who worked at the factory. Fanya had also worked at that factory until she left the ghetto. Yocheved, who felt pangs of guilt about having lied to her friend to get her to leave the ghetto, assuaged her conscience with the thought that if Fanya had not left the ghetto when she did, she would have been killed along with Lonya and the rest of the Jews who worked at the factory.

The next evening the group of nine left the ghetto through the fence. They walked all night and in the morning reached Staroye Selo, where they found that other Jews from the ghetto were gathering. Yocheved, Fanya, and Abram went into the forest to search for weapons; in the immediate aftermath of the German invasion, some Red Army soldiers had thrown their weapons aside as they fled, and as a result weapons could sometimes be found in the forest. They found some weapons and took them to Yocheved's partisan unit, hoping that this offering might diminish the partisans' anger upon discovering that Yocheved had deceived

them and had gone to the ghetto to get family and friends. The commissar of Yocheved's brigade was in fact very angry. He pointed out that he had not sent her to the ghetto to bring a pack of women and children to him, and he threatened to shoot her. But the commander of the division to which the brigade belonged defended her, and plans to punish her were dropped. Yocheved and Fanya went back to their brigade, taking Abram with them.

Yocheved volunteered for every dangerous mission that was proposed, and became known as a heroine in her unit and beyond. She planted mines and blew up trains. It was proposed that she be given a prize. She said that for her the greatest reward would be to be allowed to go back to the ghetto and bring more people to the forest. She was again sent to the ghetto; this time she took a list of names, given her by the partisans. She hid in the ghetto for four days, while others whom the partisans had put her in touch with gathered the people whose names she had been given. One member of the group was a column leader and had a white ribbon on his sleeve authorizing him to take Jews out of the ghetto. He was able to lead the group out of the ghetto without being questioned. Once outside the ghetto, Yocheved took charge. She had a pistol hidden under her jacket; if captured, she planned to kill herself rather than be taken prisoner. She led the way, and the others followed her in pairs, each pair walking close enough to the one ahead of it to keep it in its sight, but far enough away that passersby were not likely to regard them as part of a larger group. The group, which included a pharmacist, a doctor, and Sophia Sadovskaya, a member of the ghetto underground, along with her young son, left the city and reached the partisan camp in the forest safely.

While Yocheved and Fanya had rejoined their partisan unit, taking Yocheved's brother Abram with them, the others whom they had brought out of the ghetto had remained in Staroye Selo, hoping to find partisan units that would admit them. But none of the partisan units that came to the village wanted women and children. They survived by begging for food. A villager suggested that they stay in an empty cowshed lined with hay; he and others would bring them food, he said. Twelve-year-old Hinda, Yocheved's mother Nechama, and Hinda's and Yocheved's aunt Rivka lived for several months in the cowshed along with another family that had fled from the Minsk ghetto, Rachel Zuckerman and her daughter Ita, who was about Hinda's age. One morning while they were sitting in the cowshed, they heard people speaking Yiddish outside. A tall man with a mustache, wearing boots and an army uniform, entered the

cowshed and said, "Women, don't you recognize me? I'm from Minsk. My name is Zorin." The women were so happy to see him that they burst into tears and began kissing him. He promised to help them as much as he could, and left.

About a month later, Zorin appeared in the shed again, accompanied by Nahum Feldman and with a sack of food. They explained that the commander of Zorin's unit, Semyon Ganzenko, had given Zorin permission to establish a Jewish family camp in order to save as many Jews as possible. Zorin's plan was to send children from the ghetto, who knew the ghetto well and could easily slip in and out, back to get more people. He assigned Hinda and Ita to go back to the ghetto to get a group of people. Hinda began crying and said that she didn't want to go back. The Germans had killed the rest of her family, she said; now they would kill her, too. But Zorin insisted that older people couldn't accomplish this, only children. Finally Hinda's aunt Nechama said, "Hinda, there's no choice! You must go."

Zorin took the two girls to the house of a forest guide named Sonya, who gave them a list of names of people in the ghetto, including two doctors, and also the address of a house in the ghetto where there were boys age eighteen to twenty who were working for the SD, and whom the Germans planned to kill. The girls left. In a village about ten kilometers from Minsk, they walked into a German ambush. The soldiers began shooting at them, and they ran back toward Staroye Selo, to Sonya's house. She scolded them for returning and told them that they must carry out their mission; if they did not, they would be shot, she warned them. They stayed in the village that night and in the morning set out for Minsk again. They entered the ghetto, gathered the people whose names they had been given, and also their own relatives. This time Israel Rubenchik, Yocheved's father, was willing to leave. They left the ghetto, leading a group of more than thirty people. They reached Staroye Selo safely.

Hinda returned to the ghetto four more times, bringing out groups of as many as fifty each time. In the ghetto, the rumor spread that Hinda was taking people to Staroye Selo, and many people decided to leave on their own, without her. Some of those who left were killed on the way, but many survived the journey. Hundreds of Jews from the ghetto gathered in Staroye Selo and in nearby villages. Those who could not fight were placed in Zorin's family brigade; those who could were placed in fighting units, some of them in the unit assigned to protect the family camp, some in other units. Hinda was coming to be well known in the ghetto, and it was becoming dangerous for her to return. Zorin told her

that she had done enough and would not be sent to the ghetto again. Other children who had come out of the ghetto were trained to take her place.<sup>26</sup>

When I interviewed Yocheved and Abram Rubenchik in Israel, Abram brought with him a copy of the book that he had written about his experiences, *Truth about the Minsk Ghetto*, and a photograph of Natasha Shuneiko, the Byelorussian woman who had told Yocheved how to reach partisan territory.<sup>27</sup> He said that in preparation for writing the book, he had returned to Minsk and located Shuneiko, and he had taken the photograph of her, which is included in his book. "Without her," he said, "it would not have happened. She made everything that followed, possible."<sup>28</sup>

In addition to Byelorussians, there were others who helped Jews from the Minsk ghetto reach the forest. Many partisan units assigned Jews to return to the ghetto repeatedly to lead groups to the forest. Many of those whom the partisans used as forest guides were children and teenagers. There were also cases in which German soldiers and civilians in Minsk helped Jews escape the ghetto and reach the partisans. Their stories deserve to be mentioned in an account of the flight from the ghetto.

#### THE FOREST GUIDES

Partisan units that had connections to the Minsk ghetto generally employed Jews, usually Jews from the ghetto, as forest guides who either went into the ghetto or met groups of Jews outside the ghetto and led them to the forest. Men and women, adults and children, were employed in this way. But Zorin and commanders of other units in the Staroselsky Forest who participated in the effort to rescue Jews in large numbers relied largely on children, teenagers, and young women, especially those whose appearance was not stereotypically Jewish. Children and young women were less likely to be regarded as potential threats than adults, especially men. A child could avoid suspicion by taking a ball out of her pocket and playing in the road. One child guide, thirteen-year-old Sima Fiterson, used this to signal to groups that she led that there was danger ahead. When she took out her ball, they were to hide among the trees by the side of the road until she put her ball away.

Zorin and other partisan commanders relied on children because of their ability to slip in and out of the ghetto, their excellent memories, and their lack of fear. Children from the ghetto often knew its layout and the various places where one could enter or leave it better than adults. They

quickly learned the routes to the forest and were aware of every point of danger along those routes. Their detailed memory of the terrain they traversed helped them avoid getting lost and was a great advantage when it was necessary to hide. The children and teenagers who served as forest guides, some of them as young as eleven years old, were on one level aware that every time they led a group out of the ghetto they risked their own lives. But at the same time the possibility of their own deaths may not have seemed as real to them as it would have under these circumstances to adults. Many children and teenagers either possessed or quickly developed extraordinary courage and were able to function calmly and make intelligent decisions under circumstances that might have led others to panic.

There were also disadvantages to using children as forest guides: doing so placed children in situations of great danger and forced adult choices and concerns on them. But under the circumstances of the war, and the genocidal actions of the Germans, hardly anyone regarded this as an obstacle; Hinda Tassman's aunt was not alone in urging her young niece to take on the task assigned to her by the partisans. Children could be selfish and hard-hearted. Tanya Lifshitz, who served as a forest guide for the Budyonni unit, headed by Semyon Ganzenko, asked him to have her mother brought out of the ghetto. Ganzenko passed this request on to Zorin, and as a result a boy and girl from Zorin's Brigade arrived in the ghetto with Tanya's mother on their list. But they demanded gold from her in payment. She had no gold, so she remained in the ghetto.<sup>29</sup>

Sima Fiterson, twelve years old when the war began, became an exemplary forest guide: she led six groups from the ghetto to the forest, with as many as twenty in each group, and all arrived safely (see fig. 19). Sima's uncle, Aaron Fiterson, was a member of the underground, and one of her older brothers had connections to it as well; these connections may have helped prepare her for the role that she took on. While living in the ghetto with her family, she worked at the brick factory and also often went to the railway station, not far from the ghetto, where it was sometimes possible to steal salt from wagons destined for Germany. She would then take the salt to Staroye Selo, where she traded it for food. In Staroye Selo she met a Byelorussian woman named Musya who understood that Sima was a Jewish child from the ghetto and did what she could to take care of her. Musya often fed Sima and kept her overnight and also found a document for her to carry that identified her as a Byelorussian girl and made Sima's trips to the railway station and to Staroye Selo considerably safer than they would have been without it.

On March 25, 1943, Sima was forced to leave the ghetto. That day at the brick factory she joined a group of girls in singing a partisan song in Russian. A German soldier, recognizing Stalin's name among the words the girls were singing, called Sima a partisan. The other girls told her she must escape and showed her a hole under the fence surrounding the factory. Sima left the brick factory, aware that she could not return, and walked toward Staroye Selo. When she came near the village, she was stopped by two armed men; one of them said to the other, "Maybe she is a Jew." Sima noticed that one of them had a red star on his cap, and she began to cry from relief and happiness. The two men, it turned out, were Zorin and Feldman; one of them handed her an automatic rifle and said that if she could carry it, they would add her to Feldman's unit, the Stalin Brigade. After showing them that she could hold the rifle, she got in their wagon with them, and they took her to Musya, who looked after many Jews who fled to Staroye Selo and who, Zorin and Feldman thought, might be able to identify her. Musya said, "Oh, that's Simochke," and told Zorin and Feldman that she was a Jewish child from the ghetto.

The partisans gave Sima a small pistol and taught her to use it; they instructed her to shoot herself if captured. On April 30, 1943, she was assigned to bring underground members from the ghetto. She went to her family's house, and her older brother, Zyama, helped her by gathering the group. The next day she led a group of fourteen young men and six young women out of the ghetto. She went back to the ghetto four times, each time taking a group of around the same size to the forest. In June of 1943 she returned to the ghetto for the fifth time, with the intention of taking her mother out. Looking out the window of her mother's house, Sima saw Gottenbach, the German officer in charge of the ghetto, approaching the house with a Jewish policeman. She told her mother that they were looking for her. Sima's mother didn't believe it, but Sima ran to a neighbor who put Sima in a bed, covered her with a blanket, and told two of her children to sit on her. Gottenbach and the policeman came into the house and searched for Sima but didn't find her. They took her mother and two of her brothers who were at home at the time, put them in the ghetto prison, and killed them. They went to the Jewish Hospital to get Sima's father, who was recovering from a beating by a policeman whom he had stood up to. He tried to go out through a window, fell, and died. Sima hid in her neighbor's apartment; after several days two men, no doubt from the underground, came and took her out of the ghetto, and she returned to her partisan unit. Sima had her pistol with her when Gottenbach and the



Figure 19. Sima Fiterson, after the war. Photograph courtesy of Sima Fiterson Vodinskaya.

policeman entered the house, and could have killed them. But the underground forbade its members to kill Germans or police inside the ghetto, for fear of the consequences to the underground, and the ghetto population. Sima followed these orders.

Sima no longer entered the ghetto; because the Germans had become aware of her trips into the ghetto the partisans forbade Sima to return. Twice more she met groups outside the ghetto and led them to the forest; one of these groups included prisoners of war from the city, as well as Jews from the ghetto. Sima also went on other missions for the partisans: once she brought a young woman from Minsk who had worked as a cleaner at the office of the SD. The German police of the SD were in the habit of leaving their pistols in the office overnight, and the young woman took seventeen or eighteen pistols with her when she left for the forest. Sima and the same young woman (who was given one of the pistols that she had brought to the forest) were assigned to blow up a German train, which they succeeded in doing.

The partisan unit became Sima's family, and the wife of the commander, who was a nurse, took care of her. Once, when Sima became ill, and the unit's physician, a doctor from the ghetto, Maria Abramovna Kirzon, said that she needed boiled liver, the partisans captured a herd of cows from the Germans. One of the cows was slaughtered, and liver was prepared for Sima, who recovered from her illness. Toward the end of the war, the partisans decided that Sima should be sent over the front to the Big Land (unoccupied Russia). When the plane arrived to take her, Sima refused to go and escaped. In jest, the partisans arrested her for disobedience. She stayed with them until the Soviet offensive of July 1944 and the liberation of Minsk.<sup>30</sup>

#### ASSISTANCE FROM GERMAN SOLDIERS AND GERMANS

In the course of interviewing ghetto survivors I encountered what seemed to me a surprising number of stories of Germans who had helped Jews escape and reach the forest. Many of my interviewees pointed out that there were some Germans who behaved well toward the Jews, and their stories bore this out. Early in the war, a German soldier warned Sarah Goland and her family that the German authorities intended to kill all the Jews. Berta Gendelevich, a student in a medical school in Minsk who was with her family in the city of Slutsk, south of Minsk, when the war began, and was trapped in the Slutsk ghetto along with her family, told a similar story. A German soldier who was assigned to accompany her brother when he left the ghetto for work every morning warned him that the German authorities intended to kill all the Jews, and urged him to leave the ghetto.<sup>31</sup>

Misha Novodorsky, nine years old when the war began, developed a more extensive relationship with a German soldier, whom he credited with having repeatedly saved his life. Misha was the only member of his immediate family who survived the pogrom of November 7, 1941; after the pogrom he lived with his aunt and uncle. He began leaving the ghetto to get food by going under the fence. Having heard that there was a German soldier stationed near the government buildings in the city who would give food to anyone who asked for it, Misha went there, carrying a bag. He met a soldier who asked him if he would like some bread. Misha was afraid and refused the offer. But the soldier noticed that Misha's bag was empty, and put a piece of bread in it. After that Misha often returned, and he got to know the soldier, who gave his name as Willi; Misha never learned his last name. Willi told Misha that he had children, and that Misha reminded him of one of his sons. He said that



he had particular respect for Jews, because he found them cultured and intelligent. Once Misha found Willi listening on his radio to a speech by a Soviet official. The speech was in Russian; Willi asked Misha to translate for him. Misha was afraid, but he nevertheless told Willi that a Soviet official was saying that the Germans would be defeated and that they would be punished for their crimes. Willi said, "Good." Once, when Wilhelm Kube, the head of the German regional administration in Minsk, passed by, Willi said to Misha, "I hope he dies soon, then maybe the war will come to an end and I will be able to go home."

Willi urged Misha to go to the partisans and said that if Misha became a partisan and he should see Willi, he should not shoot, because he, Willi, did not intend to shoot any partisans. Willi went beyond expressing his opinions and took active steps to protect Misha. Once, when Misha went to Sovietskaya Street, where the government buildings were located, a policeman caught him and said he would take him to the police station. Willi, seeing this, said to the policeman, "We're not here to fight children," and demanded that he let Misha go. The policeman protested that the boy he had caught was a Jew. Willi took out his pistol and threatened to shoot the policeman, and the policeman let Misha go. On another occasion, when Misha left the ghetto, he came upon an ambush: a group of policemen were surrounding a group of Jews who had escaped from the ghetto. Misha saw Willi nearby and asked Willi to follow him, as if he were escorting Misha to work. Willi did this, and thus protected Misha from being caught in the ambush.

Misha did eventually go to the partisans: on October 22, 1943, he left the ghetto as usual early in the morning and later that day returned to find the ghetto fence destroyed, dead bodies lying in the streets, and the houses empty. He joined a group of children who had gathered outside the ghetto. The eldest of the children, fourteen-year-old Iosif Levin, was a forest guide for the Kutuzov Brigade, whose commissar, Israel Lapidus, was from the Minsk ghetto. Iosif Levin led the forty children who had gathered outside the ghetto on a several-day journey southward from Minsk to the base of the Kutuzov Brigade. When the children passed through German checkpoints, they identified themselves as refugees from the Russian city of Smolensk, because they had heard that there were many Russians in Smolensk who were supporters of the Germans and who had fled when the Red Army took the city. The children reached the partisan base safely.<sup>32</sup>

The partisans placed the children in peasant households in the nearby village of Porechya and supplied those households with food to help

support the children. Gendel Solomonov, a Jew from the Minsk ghetto in another partisan unit in the area, was one of those who delivered food to these households. Before this group of children arrived, he, along with other Jewish partisans in the area, had raised the question of how the Jews who were now arriving in the forest, having fled the ghetto, could be helped, and there had been a decision to provide support for Jewish children and others who could not become fighters.<sup>33</sup> Iosif Levin's younger sister, Maya, six years old at the time, was the youngest of the children in the group that made the trek to Porechya. In a much later interview Maya Krapina, born Levina, said that there were various responses in the village to the presence of so many Jewish children in their midst. One neighbor, Krapina said, protested to the women in her family that they were endangering the village; if the Germans came, she argued, the whole village would be killed. But the family that had taken Krapina in rejected this logic and treated her as a family member. After the liberation her village family urged her to go to an orphanage in Minsk, arguing that her relatives might be looking for her there, and an uncle, who had served as a partisan, found her there. But she often returned to the village to see her second mother.<sup>34</sup>

The case of a German who helped Minsk Jews that became most widely known after the war was that of the German lieutenant Willi Schultz.<sup>35</sup> Leah, or Liza, Gutkovich, twenty-five years old at the beginning of the war, was a major facilitator of this project (see fig. 20); she related this story in several interviews many decades later. Liza was one of a brigade of 200 Jewish women who worked carrying wood and coal to heat the German Air Force Command, which was in one of the government buildings on Sovietskaya Street in Minsk. This brigade worked under a German lieutenant, Willi Schultz. On March 2, 1942, the women returned from work as usual and were stopped at the gate. A pogrom was taking place in the ghetto; due to prior warnings from the Judenrat and the underground, many people had hid, and the Germans had not met their quota, so they were stopping columns of workers returning to the ghetto, separating skilled from unskilled workers, and shooting the unskilled. Though Liza was not in fact a skilled worker, the officer who checked her pushed her into the line of skilled workers, and she survived.

The next day she returned to her workplace and found that almost all the women who had worked there previously had been killed; their places had been taken by others, some of them German Jewish women, from the "special ghetto" inside the ghetto. Schultz ordered them to

Figure 20. Leah (Liza) Gutkovich and her first husband, before the war. Photograph courtesy of Leah Gutkovich.



stand in line. He walked down the line, looking at the women and asking their names. As he stood in front of one of the German Jewish women, he shook her hand and exchanged a few words with her. Afterwards, Liza approached the woman, who introduced herself as Ilse Stein, and asked her what might have been the cause of this extraordinary exchange: had she known Schultz before the war? Ilse said that she had not, but she thought that Schultz might be attracted to her.

This turned out to be the case. Ilse and Liza became friends. Schultz assigned them to serve as his assistants, which meant that they had to come to his office every morning and get ration cards, which Ilse was to distribute among the German Jews and Liza among the Byelorussian Jews; these were for the thin soup and bit of bread that Jewish workers received at midday. It became clear that Schultz had made this arrangement in order to have contact with Ilse (see fig. 21). Once, when Liza went to get the cards by herself, Schultz asked her why the Germans were killing Jews. Liza was astonished by the question. "You are a German officer," she said to Schultz. "How can you ask me such a question? All I can tell you is that before the Germans arrived, we were all equal, Jews, Byelorussians, people of other nationalities. Such was our life in the Soviet Union." Another time, when Liza went to Schultz's office by herself, Schultz told her that he had fallen in love with Ilse, and he wondered if Liza had advice about how he could save Ilse. Liza said that if she were to escape the ghetto, she would be able to survive; she had grown up in a village, knew Byelorussian, and knew how to do farmwork. She said that in Ilse's case she did not know what to suggest, since Ilse knew no Russian, let alone Byelorussian, and would have no way of surviving outside



Figure 21. Willi Schultz and Ilse Stein. Photograph courtesy of Leah Zalamanovna Gutovich.

the ghetto. Schultz apparently sought advice and help from others as well. A German officer, a pilot, who was a Communist, offered to fly the two women across the front line to Moscow; Liza would be taken along to assure the Soviets that the two Germans she accompanied were not spies. But the pilot was sent to the front before this idea could be carried out. This was probably just as well, because the chances of their surviving such as escape would have been remote.

A Byelorussian, Sergei Gelin, who also worked at the Air Force Command, knew Liza from having worked with her at the Minsk power station before the war. Gelin tried to find ways of speaking with Liza privately at work, in places where they would not be seen. Gelin gave Liza leaflets, from which it became clear to her that he was connected with the underground. Liza told him about Schultz and his love of Ilse. Gelin told Liza about the situation at the front; at the end of 1942, she learned about the battle of Stalingrad and the declining strength of the German army from him. Liza reported all this to Schultz, who was delighted, seeing in it a possibility that Ilse might be saved. Schultz asked Liza how she knew all this. Since she could not tell him that she was in contact with

the underground (even if indirectly; it was not clear that Gelin was an underground member), she said instead that she heard people talking about it on the street as she went to work. But she pointed out that Schultz had a radio set and could learn the news himself. Schultz responded that he was not allowed to listen to Soviet broadcasts; furthermore, he reminded her, he did not understand Russian. But he proposed that he would assign her to clean a small room, in which he would put a radio, at a certain time every day; the soldiers who worked in that room would have to leave while she mopped the floor. While she worked, she could listen to Soviet broadcasts, and then she could tell him the news.

Once, while Liza was mopping the floor and listening to the radio, one of the German officers who worked in the room, a man named Fischer, entered and demanded to know who had turned on the radio. Liza said she didn't know. Fischer asked her what she had heard on the radio, and she said that she had heard that the Germans were near Moscow and would take it soon. Fischer said she was lying, showed her a card identifying him as a member of the SS, and said he would deal with her later. Liza, terrified, went to Schultz, who said that he would talk to Fischer, and told her not to worry. Liza pointed out that Fischer was a member of the SS; she said that she had to leave immediately. Liza then went to Gelin and told him what had happened. He promised to rescue her. Later that day he told her that men from the ghetto underground would come to her that evening, in the ghetto, and would tell her what to do. Liza took Gelin's offer of help more seriously than Schultz's. She remained at work for the rest of the day and went back to the ghetto in the evening as usual.

That evening two men came to Liza's room in the ghetto and told her to go to work the next morning and tell Schultz that if he wanted to save Ilse, he should find a truck and weapons and make out a document for a team of workers to go to the forest. The underground would provide a map to partisan territory, and a guide, and Ilse and Liza would be sent to the partisans, along with twenty-five members of the underground. At first Schultz was taken aback and said that he didn't know where he would get the truck and the weapons. All he wanted, he said, was to save Ilse and Liza. Liza explained that this was impossible; two women couldn't be sent to the partisans alone; it had to appear to be a group of workers, going to cut wood in the forest. The underground had told her, she said, that it had to be a group of twenty-five: twelve women and thirteen men. Schultz said that he would see what he could do. Liza and Ilse were told

to prepare to leave, and both were told that they could take companions. Liza arranged to take four friends with her, and Ilse her two younger sisters. Liza and her friends were told to wait in the ghetto the next morning, as usual, in front of the Labor Exchange.

The next morning, March 1, 1943, Liza and her friends joined a group organized by the underground and an underground guide with a map waiting near the Labor Exchange, in the ghetto, for the truck. The truck was late, and waiting became dangerous, so many left. After half an hour the truck arrived. Schultz was in the truck, along with Ilse and her two sisters, whom he had picked up in the German ghetto, and a driver. He had made out a pass for a group of workers to go to Rudensk, in the direction of Mogilev. Schultz had decided to go to the partisans himself. The driver, however, was not aware of the plan. The underground guide said that this was too irregular and too dangerous and that he would not go with them. He gave the map to Schultz. Enough Jews were rounded up to take the place of those who had left earlier, and the truck left the ghetto. With a German lieutenant and a German officer on board, and an official pass for a group of workers, there was no difficulty getting past German checkpoints. They reached partisan territory and found themselves at a river; there had been a bridge, but it was destroyed. They got out of the truck, and one of the young men took off his clothes, swam across the river, and knocked on the door of a house on the other side. An elderly man came out, got into a rowboat, rowed it across the river, and began ferrying members of the group across the river.

The first group to cross the river included Schultz, the driver, Ilse, Ilse's sisters, and Liza. They went into the old man's house; the rest soon arrived and remained outside. Men with rifles, whom Liza took to be partisans, arrived, entered the house, and began checking everyone. The driver became ill. As Liza recalled the scene decades later, Schultz took Ilse into his arms and told her that he had rescued her because he loved her. The partisans grasped the situation and treated Schultz with respect. They took the whole group to a partisan base; Schultz, Ilse, Liza, and the driver were placed in one unit, and the others were dispersed among other units. Schultz and Ilse, now a couple, were given a room to live in. Everyone was questioned, Schultz and the driver especially intensively. Schultz said that he was an officer and had been involved in the anti-aircraft defense of Minsk, and he gave the partisans information about where German units were located. Asked what his intentions were, he said that he was prepared to follow any orders that the partisans might



Figure 22. Sergei Gelin. Photograph courtesy of Leah Zalmanovna Gutkovich.

give him, but that his greatest desire was to go to Moscow and tell the world about the brutal German treatment of people in the occupied territories.

Liza and the driver were ordered to leave, to join another partisan unit, while Schultz and Ilse remained. The driver left the unit one night, lost his way, and was taken in by a local peasant who gave him food and vodka, and when he fell asleep drunk, called the partisans. The driver tried to explain that he had been on his way back to Minsk to get more recruits, but the partisans didn't believe him, and they shot him. Schultz and Ilse were taken by plane to Moscow. For several months Schultz and Ilse lived in a compound for foreigners outside Moscow. Then officers of the NKVD came and took Schultz away. Ilse never saw him again. After the war, the official answer to an inquiry about him was that he had been taken to a camp of prisoners of war and had become ill with meningitis. After the war, Ilse was offered and accepted Soviet citizenship. She moved to Birobidzhan, where she eventually met and married

a Russian Jew from Rostow, where she moved. In the late 1980s Liza found an ad in the Minsk evening newspaper placed there by Ilse Schultz, who said that she was looking for the people who had rescued her from the Minsk ghetto, and asked them to write or call her in Rostow. Liza contacted her, and she made the first of several trips to Minsk to see Liza.

After the group had left Minsk, Sergei Gelin, the Byelorussian who had arranged the rescue of Liza and Ilse, was arrested, interrogated, sent to Auschwitz, and from there to two other camps (see fig. 22). He was liberated by Allied troops, returned to Minsk very ill, and died at the age of thirty-four. His wife and two sons lived in poverty. Liza, who had married a partisan commander during the war, helped to support the family. “All of this happened thanks to him,” she said. “Without him it would not have been possible.”<sup>36</sup>



## The Soviet Betrayal of the Minsk Underground

In late June and early July of 1944 the Red Army swept through Byelorussia, and on July 3, 1944, Minsk was liberated. Partisan units throughout Byelorussia converged on Minsk, and on July 16 a massive partisan victory parade was held. Some partisans were mobilized into the Red Army, but many Minsk residents who had served in partisan units remained in Minsk and tried to resume something like the lives they had led before the war. The Soviet authorities returned to power. In the post-war years the partisan struggle, and the Communist underground that had supported it, were celebrated throughout the Soviet Union. The Great Patriotic War became the basis of a new or at least refashioned and revived Soviet identity, transcending the various ethnic groups, or nationalities, composing the Soviet Union. Those who had voluntarily risked their lives to defeat the Nazis and defend the Soviet motherland stood at the moral center of this new understanding of Soviet identity. For many years the less heroic aspects of the partisan struggle, such as the often forced expropriation of peasants' property and the undisciplined, sometimes criminal, behavior of some partisan units, were omitted from public discussion of the war. A partisan record came to be a prerequisite for a successful career in politics. For those who had lived in occupied territory during the war, the question of whether one had or had not contributed in some way to the partisan struggle was particularly acute, because the Soviet authorities held an attitude that amounted to "guilty until proven innocent." Living under German rule imparted a

taint of collaboration, which could be dispelled only if one could prove that one had engaged in resistance.

Given all this, one might think that the surviving members of the Minsk underground would have been treated as heroes. But in fact the returning Soviet authorities regarded them with suspicion and soon after the liberation began arresting former members of the underground and charging them with collaboration. Most of the arrests took place between 1944 and 1946; some had taken place before the war ended. By 1949 at least 126 people who had been members of or were connected with the Minsk underground had been arrested.<sup>1</sup>

In 1945 Chasya Pruslina, a former leader of the ghetto underground, and other former members of the Minsk underground who had not been included in the arrests, began an effort to gain official recognition of the Minsk City Committee as a legitimate underground organization, partly in order to win the Minsk underground the credit that it deserved in the history of the war and partly to force a reconsideration of the cases of those who had been arrested, and to protect all former members of the Minsk underground and their families from the discrimination that resulted from a negative view of the underground on the part of Soviet officialdom. Pruslina, a woman of stunning integrity and courage, was greatly admired not only by former members of the underground but by many others as well. In the years after the war she was treated with respect, or at least a certain trepidation, even by Soviet officials, who regarded her as a thorn in their sides, and as a result she was able to take stands that might have landed others in prison, if not worse.

Pruslina, who was forty-one years old when the war began, died long before I began my research, and thus I had to rely on her papers, to which her daughter, Zinaida Alexeevna Nikodemova, gave me access, and on stories about Pruslina told me by her daughter and others. One of the stories that Zinaida Alexeevna told me was that soon after the liberation Pruslina was asked to meet with a representative of the Minsk City Committee. V. I. Kozlov, who acted at that time as Secretary of the Minsk Regional Committee, directly above the City Committee, was, as Pruslina was beginning to realize, a major figure in the campaign to discredit the Minsk underground. Kozlov had close ties to Ponomarenko and also to L. P. Tsanova, who, as head of the Byelorussian NKVD, reported to Laurenty Beria. Pruslina was given an offer: if she would agree to continue to use her non-Jewish underground name, Pelageya Petrovna Fedjuk, and not resume the use of her original, identifiably Jewish name, she would be given a position in the Soviet hierarchy. She would have financial security and a stellar career. For the

single mother of a small child, the offer of financial security, at least, must have been very attractive. But she turned the offer down and resumed using her Jewish name, Chasya Mendeleeвна Pruslina. For the rest of her life she lived from hand to mouth, finding teaching jobs where she could. Few others would have turned down such a request from Stalin's supporters. Few others would have survived having done so, unscathed.<sup>2</sup>

While Stalin was alive, it was impossible to challenge the official denunciation of the Minsk underground. Soon after he died, in 1953, Pruslina and other former members of the Minsk underground initiated a campaign for its rehabilitation (see fig. 23), and in 1960 they won: the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia (CC-CPB) voted to recognize and rehabilitate the Minsk underground City Committee of 1941–42. Of those who had been arrested, 113 were exonerated. Some had died in prison or in labor camps. Some had been released earlier but still lived under the shadow of a supposed history of collaboration. Some, who remained in detention, and who had family members able to press their cases, were released. Despite the official recognition of the Minsk underground, a cloud continued to hang over its memory. Elena Gapova, who was born and grew up in postwar Minsk, told me that when she was in high school in the early 1970s, the Minsk underground carried the taint of collaboration and was considered a topic to be avoided.<sup>3</sup> But underground members could collect pensions for those who had participated in the war, and their participation in the underground could not be held against them, at least officially, when they or their children applied for jobs or to universities.

In 1970, Pruslina wrote a detailed account of the struggle to gain recognition for the Minsk underground in which she also traced the development of hostility to it on the part of a group of Soviet officials. Her account, which is backed up by documents in Byelorussian archives as well as those among her papers, provides the framework for the following narrative. In the introduction to her account, Pruslina wrote:

We, former members of the Minsk underground, are very happy with the recognition that came at last in 1959 [the Presidium's vote for recognition was based on a resolution approved at a meeting during the previous year, but then rescinded]. The main opponents of the recognition of the service of Minsk patriots in the Great Patriotic War were P. K. Ponomarenko [First Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party], V. I. Kozlov, Malin and others. V. I. Kozlov exhibited the greatest persistence. He was the one who tried to monopolize the credit for our achievements. . . . We don't want to speak badly of the dead. But a fact is an obstinate thing, and I will tell you only the facts. I've known them since 1942 and I can't be silent.



Figure 23. Chasya Mendelevna Pruslina, in the 1950s. Photograph courtesy of Zinaida Alexeevna Nikodemova.

I'm writing too late. I don't have the memory I used to have; I'm a lot older. There is no fury anymore. The older people get, the more patient they become. So, why am I writing this? The traces of the long and persistent struggle for the recognition of the Minsk underground can be found in numerous documents: in the applications and letters to the Central Committees of the Byelorussian Communist Party and the Communist Party of the USSR. For the person who will read these materials, especially after we die (for we are all very old people), it will be difficult to believe that it took twenty years of struggle for the recognition of the merits of patriots during the war years. Living witnesses can be useful for history. And as it turned out, I was forced not only to be a witness of this struggle, but also to be a participant in it.<sup>4</sup>

#### SOVIET SUSPICION OF THE MINSK UNDERGROUND

In the summer of 1942 the Minsk City Committee was overjoyed to hear, via a partisan unit with which it was in contact, of the establishment of an underground Regional Center by the Byelorussian Communist Party in the Lyuban swamps nearly 150 kilometers south of Minsk, and that the Regional Committee wanted to be in touch with the Minsk

underground. From its inception the Minsk underground had operated on its own, aligned in spirit with the Soviets but lacking either concrete direction or material support from what underground members and other pro-Soviet people called the Big Land. The legitimate, authorized Underground Committee, to which the founders of the Minsk underground had done their best to defer, had never appeared. Efforts to contact the Byelorussian Communist Party, now based in Moscow, had not been successful. The news from the Lyuban swamps held out the promise of a breakthrough.

The City Committee asked Chasya Pruslina to make the journey to the Lyuban swamps. Pruslina was by this time the main liaison between the ghetto underground and the City Committee; she lived in the Russian district and headed an underground group there, in which she was the only Jew. In addition to maintaining contact with the ghetto underground, she was centrally involved in the campaign to rescue Jewish children, she distributed underground literature, she found places for underground members to live, and she acted, as she wrote in her memoirs, as a passport agency: with the help of Vasili Saychik, a member of the Byelorussian underground, she made large numbers of false passports and passed them out to underground members in the ghetto and the Russian district. Her underground work frequently required her to cross the ghetto border. Pruslina learned to deflect attention from herself by playing the part of an old woman. Once, on a late December evening, before she acquired a false passport of her own, she was walking along Respublikanskaya Street, just outside the ghetto, and noticed that nearby people were being stopped and asked for their documents. Two policemen approached her and one of them yelled, "Stop!" He asked where she was going. "Home, from work," she said, in Byelorussian. He asked for documents. She took out the pass that she had been given by the Judenrat, and said, "Here, dear boys, read this for yourselves. I can't, I'm an illiterate old woman." They shone their flashlights in her face and said, "Go ahead, old woman," and slapped her on the shoulder. The pass that she had offered them said that she was a Jew; perhaps they let her proceed because they took her to be a harmless old woman or perhaps they were illiterate or both.<sup>5</sup> Pruslina was in fact one of the most highly educated members of the Minsk underground. She had studied in a graduate program in history and before the war had been a faculty member at the Communist University, teaching courses in the history of the Soviet Union and in Marxism. The City Committee chose Pruslina to represent them at the Regional Center partly because she was widely respected and

trusted, and partly because the Gestapo was on her trail, and it was necessary to get her out of Minsk.

Pruslina chose her friend, Anna Yezubchik, to accompany her. Yezubchik was a Byelorussian and a member of the Communist Party whom Pruslina had recruited into the underground; the two women knew each other from having attended the same graduate program in history. The two women met with Ivan Kovalyov, the secretary of the City Committee, who gave them a detailed account of the committee's work to pass on to the Regional Committee and asked them also to pass on a request for a radio transmitter through which they could remain in touch, and for money, newspapers, and literature. They were given several letters, written on tissue paper, that Pruslina sewed into her clothes so that they would be invisible, some German money, a loaf of bread, and some items to exchange in case they needed to claim that they were going to the countryside to exchange items for food. They traced their route on a map and were given a password: when they reached partisan territory, they were to insist upon being taken to a Comrade Leschenya in the village of Albinsk, and they were to ask him, "Is the crow dead?" If he answered, "Yes, it's dead," they would be in the right place.

The journey took seven days, and it led through an area where battles between the Germans and the partisans were taking place. Asking the way to Albinsk and the villages near it was dangerous in itself, because the question made it clear that the women were intentionally heading toward partisan territory. One man, riding his bicycle along the road, stopped when he saw them, looked around, and said, "Leave immediately, everyone gets killed here," and darted off, but another man told them how to avoid a battle that was taking place nearby and reach the swamps where the partisans were located. The women followed his advice, went into the swamps, and spent a night there. In the morning they came upon four armed men who said they were policemen but were dressed in civilian clothes; the women thought that they were partisans. The men arrested them and took them to a village where there were men on the streets wearing the stars of the partisan movement on their caps; clearly, they were now in partisan territory.

The two women were interrogated. It was concluded that they were spies from Minsk, and they were condemned to be shot. Fortunately, just before they were executed, a member of the Regional Committee who happened to be in the village intervened. He knew that the Regional Committee was waiting for the arrival of representatives from Minsk, and when he heard that there were two women from Minsk who were about

to be shot as spies, he ordered that the execution be halted. On September 11 Pruslina and Yezubchik arrived at the Regional Center, where the leaders of the Regional Committee, S. N. Leschenya and V. I. Kozlov, welcomed them warmly. The women were bombarded with questions about the situation in Minsk. Kozlov informed P. K. Ponomarenko, the Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party and Chief of Staff of the Soviet Partisan Movement, of their arrival, by telegram. Ponomarenko sent his greetings and asked that they write a report on the work of the Minsk City Committee. Pruslina and Yezubchik remained at the Regional Center. Over the next several weeks they filled two notebooks with everything they knew about the work of the Minsk underground. Kozlov promised to get the supplies that had been requested, told the women to get some rest, and said he would make sure that they returned to Minsk safely. There was talk of establishing an outpost of the Regional Center closer to Minsk so that contact could be maintained without requiring the difficult and dangerous journey that the women had undertaken.

Kozlov left for Moscow, and about two weeks later, presumably in late September, a Comrade Ganenko arrived from Moscow to hold a meeting of the staff of the Regional Center and partisan leaders. He showed no interest in listening to what Pruslina and Yezubchik had to say, and insulted them in front of others, saying that street women knew more than they did. Leschenya and others at the Center began to treat the women with suspicion and hostility; the women found that they were constantly being watched, as if they were spies. They had no idea what had brought about this sudden change. Soon they were taken, under escort, to the Voroshilov Brigade, from which the Minsk City Committee had heard of the Regional Center's existence. Varvashenya, the commissar of the brigade, who had a good relationship with the Minsk City Committee, welcomed them and told them that he had heard that there had been mass arrests of underground members in Minsk. He asked them to go to Minsk to find out what was taking place.

Pruslina and Yezubchik entered Minsk separately, agreeing to meet at an underground apartment later. Pruslina met a member of the underground on the street, who took her aside and told her that all the members of the Second City Committee had been arrested, hundreds of others had been arrested as well, many who had escaped arrest were fleeing to the forest, and she and Yezubchik must leave the city immediately. Pruslina had been given a letter by the Regional Committee to be delivered to the City Committee. She managed to get it to the wife of a member of the underground, who promised to put it in a bottle and bury it in her garden, and

then dig it up and deliver it to the Soviet authorities upon the liberation of Minsk. Pruslina and Yezubchik left Minsk, went back to the Voroshilov Brigade, and gave Varvashenya a report on what they had found in Minsk. Soon they found that they were being treated with the same disrespect by Varvashenya and by others in his unit that they had encountered in the Regional Center. Varvashenya roughly ordered Pruslina to leave the partisan base and work in a hospital associated with the partisan unit, though she knew nothing about medicine and had no desire to work there. Yezubchik and several other women from the Minsk underground were sent to a different partisan unit. Pruslina wrote later: "When we returned from Minsk . . . the attitude toward us suddenly changed for the worse. I won't describe all the mockery. No one trusted us, and whenever something happened in partisan detachments, 'damned Minsk spies' were always to blame. For instance, in the Suvorov Detachment, Anna Yezubchik and Maria Baturina [another former Minsk underground member] were publicly prevented from taking the Partisans' Oath. There were many similar occasions."<sup>6</sup> In the winter of 1942 and the spring and summer of 1943 groups sent to partisan units by the Minsk underground were often greeted with suspicion and subjected to days of interrogation.<sup>7</sup>

Pruslina does not give the date when she and Yezubchik returned to the Voroshilov Brigade, but from her account it seems to have been in late October 1942. Later that fall, on November 20, 1942, Ponomarenko sent a radiogram classified as top secret—that is, to be sent over airwaves accessible only to partisan units—to partisan commanders throughout Byelorussia, which led to a dramatic shift in the attitude of partisan commanders toward the Minsk underground. Perhaps it was Ponomarenko's radiogram that caused the change in Varvashenya's attitude toward Pruslina and Yezubchik, or perhaps Ponomarenko's radiogram reinforced a message that had already been sent by Kozlov and Leschenya of the Regional Committee. Ponomarenko's radiogram read:

To all Byelorussian partisan brigades and detachments:

German intelligence in Minsk has organized a false center of the partisan movement in order to locate partisan detachments and on behalf of this center to send traitors [and] provocative directives to these partisan detachments, and to liquidate these partisan detachments.

This center has been exposed by the partisan units of the Minsk Zone. There is information that in this zone, for purposes of German intelligence, a second center has been created, which is also sending directives and people, and is trying to contact partisan detachments. I order:

In order to prevent enemy agents from infiltrating the detachments, partisan detachments should not make any contacts with representatives of any



organizations from Minsk. They should not provide them with any information about the location, personnel, armaments or activities of the partisan units. The representatives coming to partisan detachments, appearing in partisan units, should be carefully checked[,] and those about whom there are doubts should be arrested.

*Ponomarenko*<sup>8</sup>

In 1945, after the liberation of Minsk, the Soviet authorities held a seminar in honor of the first anniversary of the liberation of Byelorussia, directed at the commissars, or political leaders, of partisan units. Pruslina was invited to speak on the Minsk underground; she described its achievements in detail, and with great pride. Her lecture was met with astonished silence, and afterwards many from the audience came to ask her questions. "You spoke so lovingly about the heroism of the Minsk underground," they said. "We are astonished at what you have said. Our opinion of the members of the underground has been completely different. In the fall of 1942, the Regional Committee provided us with a very different perspective on the Minsk underground." "And what was that perspective?" Pruslina asked. The commissars responded that the document that they received from the Regional Committee said: "It is necessary to be very careful with the people coming from Minsk, especially with those connected to the Gestapo City Committee." "You can imagine," they told her, "how we treated the people coming from the Minsk underground to partisan detachments. We treated them in accordance with the laws of war."<sup>9</sup> Around the same time Pruslina encountered the same attitude more directly, from Kozlov himself. For a number of years after the liberation, Pruslina taught the history of the USSR through an evening school run by the Minsk City Committee, and at one point Kozlov took her course. In every lecture Pruslina would raise the issue of the recognition of the Minsk underground. Each time, Pruslina wrote, Kozlov said the same thing: "There was no underground movement in Minsk. What you call 'the Communist underground' was organized by the Gestapo in order to identify Soviet patriots and destroy them." He would go on to claim that all organized resistance in the Minsk region had taken place through him, and that it was he who had led the partisan movement throughout the Minsk region, including that in the city of Minsk.<sup>10</sup>

#### CHARGES OF COLLABORATION

Ponomarenko's order, and the order issued by the Regional Committee, which the partisan commissars described to Pruslina in 1945, led to

many arrests and convictions of former members of the Minsk underground. Some took place during the remaining year and a half of the war in partisan units or on the other side of the front, but most took place after the liberation. No one was arrested merely for having been a member of the Minsk underground. But in the charges made against those arrested a former connection with the Minsk underground was often used to support claims that actions that might otherwise have appeared innocent involved treachery. The case of Nina Odintsova, a member of the Minsk underground who had left Minsk and gone to the Voroshilov Brigade on October 6, 1942, and in late November was shot as a spy, shows how a connection to the Minsk underground could be woven into charges of collaboration. After the war, Nina's mother, Maria Voroshilov, wrote a letter to Ponomarenko protesting her daughter's execution and claiming that Nina had been a patriot, not a collaborator.

A file was compiled that included statements from leaders and members of the Voroshilov Brigade and a regional partisan official. Statements in the file charged that Odintsova had tried to signal to the Germans during an ambush and had tried to get to the German side during one partisan operation. These accusations were not backed up by details concerning these actions, but rather by references to Odintsova's acquaintance with Kovalyov, who was at that time the secretary of the Minsk City Committee. In late September 1942 he was arrested, along with the other members of the City Committee, and according to some accounts he turned informer and provided information about other underground members. Before his arrest, and before Odintsova left for the Voroshilov Brigade, he visited the Odintsov family frequently, to meet with Nina's father, and the Odintsov family hid him at one point. After the arrest of Kovalyov and other underground members in late September and early October 1942, and after Ponomarenko's message to partisan commanders in late November, Nina Odintsova was accused of having gone to the Voroshilov unit at Kovalyov's request, and having gathered information about the unit. One letter accused her of having remained in touch with Kovalyov after arriving in the brigade, which would have been impossible, because by that time he had been arrested. The case against Odintsova rested substantially on her family's connection with Kovalyov, and not just on the charge that he co-operated with the Germans after his arrest, but on the much more questionable assumption that he was also collaborating before his arrest.<sup>11</sup> Kovalyov may have turned informer after he was arrested, but this would not in itself suggest that he was a collaborator before his arrest. Nor would collaboration before his arrest prove that others whom he was in contact

with were also collaborators. Constructing a chain of guilt of this sort requires a failure to recognize that some people break under torture. It also suggests an imperative to find spies, and an inclination to take evidence against the accused, however shaky, more seriously than evidence in his or her favor.

Many of the accusations leveled against former members of the Minsk underground rested on even more questionable chains of guilt by association than Nina Odintsova's connection to Kovalyov, and on charges that were even more misconstrued. Odintsova was at least accused of having signaled to the Germans. Others were charged with collaboration for having been employed by the Germans, although they had been using their jobs to gain information for the underground, or for having engaged in actions as partisans that were routine in the partisan movement, but that could be construed after the war as unusual and reprehensible. Nikolai Nikitin had been a member of the underground Military Council in Minsk, which was destroyed in the wave of arrests that took place in late March 1942. Nikitin escaped this mass arrest because he was no longer in Minsk when it took place. He had been made the head of a partisan brigade in which there were many former Minsk underground members. In September 1942 Nikitin's brigade crossed the front line. Nikitin and other leaders of the brigade were later arrested by the Soviets, and on October 13, 1943, Nikitin was sentenced to fifteen years in the labor camps, for "belonging to the German intelligence service and provocative activity." He was charged with having organized robberies of the common people "at the order of the German agents Rogov, Belov and Kotikov," and having crossed the front line without permission.

Drawing a connection between Nikitin and Rogov, Belov, and Kotikov was the equivalent of charging Nina Odintsova with having had a connection with Kovalyov. Rogov and Belov had been the leaders of the Military Council, of which Nikitin had been a member. Kotikov was a member of the Second City Committee. Rogov and Belov apparently cooperated with the Germans after their arrests in late March 1942, as Kovalyov may have done after his arrest six months later. Kotikov was arrested as a result of the second failure, in late September 1942, and apparently turned informer, but it is difficult to be sure of what really happened, because Kotikov's statement to the Soviets, that he had betrayed underground members to the Germans, was extracted by interrogators who probably used methods similar to those used by the Germans. The Soviets' charge against Nikitin also mentioned that he had appointed a man named Gvozdyev as commissar, and that Gvozdyev was also

suspected of collaboration. The charges against Gvozdyev, which I will address later, were entirely concocted. The charge that Nikitin had “organized robberies of the common people” referred to the fact that, like other partisan units, Nikitin’s brigade was supported by provisions taken from local peasants. Charging Nikitin’s brigade with having crossed the front line was odd, considering that in other cases having remained in occupied territory was taken as evidence of a desire to collaborate with the Germans. In 1957 Nikitin, along with many others, was exonerated. He was still in a labor camp. When his daughter brought him the news that he was to be released, he had a heart attack and died.<sup>12</sup>

Some former members of the Minsk underground were arrested during the war for reasons that might have led to their arrest without their connection to the Minsk underground. Vasili Ivanovich Saychik, one of whose underground pseudonyms was “the Old Man,” and who had helped establish and run the underground printing press at the Voronovs’ apartment in the Russian district, was one of the many underground members arrested by the Germans in late September 1942, but, unlike most, he managed to escape. He fled Minsk and joined a partisan unit that crossed the front line at the end of 1942. He was arrested and accused of having been recruited to work with German intelligence, and of having left German custody with permission. Few of those arrested by the Germans managed to escape, but those who did later faced Soviet disbelief that such escape was possible. In 1943 a Soviet court sentenced Saychik to five years in a labor camp. Four years later his case was reconsidered, and he was exonerated.<sup>13</sup>

In some cases, the arrests of former members of the Minsk underground were justified explicitly on the basis of that connection. Leonid Semyonovich Baranovsky was arrested on January 10, 1943. He was at this time a private in Nikitin’s brigade. After Nikitin’s arrest in October 1943, the brigade was dispersed, and most of its members were let go. The conviction of Baranovsky stated:

Baranovsky . . . stayed in occupied Minsk, where he had criminal connections with the Minsk Underground Party Committee organized by the Germans with provocative purposes. . . . Knowing about the treacherous activity of the members of the “underground committee[,]” Baranovsky continued to have contacts with it until June 1942. Then he joined Nikitin’s partisan brigade on the recommendation of Kozlov, who was a member of the Committee and was apparently a German agent. While in Nikitin’s brigade Baranovsky established a criminal connection with Nikitin.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the accusations against members of the Minsk underground were based on the fact that they had worked for the Germans during the

war, which was taken as evidence of voluntary collaboration. Some of them took their positions at the request of the underground; some of them obtained these positions on their own but used the access their positions gave them to gather information for the underground. Some were simply trying to support themselves during the war. Some of the accused were able to show that they had not been collaborators and were released during the 1940s, but in the meantime they had sat in jail or performed hard labor in a camp for months or in some cases years. Some served terms of several years and were released, and some, in the late 1950s, were still in prison or in labor camps. Many were not exonerated until the late 1950s, when, in the context of increasing pressure on the Byelorussian Communist Party to recognize the Minsk underground, many cases were brought up for reconsideration.

In some instances, although former underground members were arrested because it appeared from the work that they had done during the war that they were willing collaborators, their cases were dropped when it was shown that they were actually working for the underground. Aaron Fiterson, for instance, was arrested in July 1945 for having served in the ghetto police and having participated in pogroms and raids. It was established, however, that he had joined the ghetto police under the direction of the underground and had helped people escape the ghetto, and so on November 22, 1945, he was released, and his case was closed.<sup>15</sup> Varvara Plavinskaya, a physician and member of the underground, was also released after it was shown that what had appeared to be collaboration had actually been underground work. Plavinskaya worked in a hospital in the Russian district during the war, was arrested on February 28, 1946, for having done so and for having become a close acquaintance of the director of the hospital, who was a member of the nationalist, pro-German organization National Labor Union of the New Generation. Plavinskaya was sentenced to eight years in prison. But she appealed the case and was able to show that she had worked at the hospital and established connections with its director under the orders of the Minsk underground. She was exonerated in 1948.<sup>16</sup> These cases, however, were unusual. Most underground members who were arrested were not exonerated until the late 1950s or early 1960s.

Maria Skomorokhova and her husband, Pyotr, were arrested in 1948, in a case in which working for the Germans was given as the cause of arrest, although in fact it had been a vehicle for underground work. Maria was charged with having voluntarily worked at the Minsk prison during the war, as a supervisor of the women's section; Pyotr, who worked as a

courier in the German court in Minsk, was also charged with having voluntarily worked for the Germans. Maria and Pyotr were given prison sentences of twenty-five years each. When their cases were reconsidered, eleven years later, it was noted that both had worked for the Minsk underground. Maria had used her job in the Minsk prison to help free members of the underground, and Pyotr had helped her in this effort. They were both exonerated in 1959. Other files do not address the question of whether underground members carried out underground work on their jobs, or not, but simply note that they were acting under the instructions of the underground. But it seems likely that they engaged in underground work on their jobs, because underground members who had jobs that put them in contact with Germans were able to gather useful information for the underground and engage in sabotage.<sup>17</sup>

Irma Leyzer was arrested in December 1943, while she was a member of a partisan unit, and accused of having remained in occupied Minsk and having voluntarily worked for the Germans, first as a nurse and then as a waitress in a military canteen. She was sentenced to seven years in a labor camp. When she was exonerated, in 1961, it was noted that she had been in contact with the Minsk underground and had acted under the direction of Zhan, or Ivan Kabushkin, a member of the City Committee. Evgenia Lyagushevich was arrested in September 1944 and charged with collaboration, based on her work in the kitchen at the Minsk railway station and close connections with German officers there. She was sentenced to five years. In 1960, when her case was reconsidered, the file noted that she had been working with the Minsk underground; she was exonerated.<sup>18</sup> There were many more cases of this sort. I was able to examine the files of sixteen former members of the Minsk underground who were arrested as collaborators; according to Evgenii Ivanovich Baranovsky, who was a member of the committee that voted in 1959 to rehabilitate the Minsk underground, 128 cases were brought up for review at that time. As he pointed out, there were probably other members of the Minsk underground as well who were arrested but whose cases were not reconsidered. In order for a case to be reviewed, a friend or family member had to press for such an action. Many underground members were arrested under their underground names. Their relatives and friends might not have been aware that they had been arrested, but might have assumed that they died during the war.<sup>19</sup>

The many cases in which former members of the Minsk underground were not able to defend themselves raises the question: why did they not argue that they had been engaged in resistance, not collaboration? First,

the way to show that befriending German officials, or in other ways appearing to collaborate, was not really collaboration was to show that one had been a member of the Minsk underground. After Ponomarenko's radiogram, citing one's former membership in the Minsk underground did not necessarily help one's case but might deepen the presumption that one had collaborated with the Germans. There were cases in which witnesses showed that accusations of collaboration were false, and the accused were released; Vasili Saychik's release after the testimony of Goffman and other underground members is an example.<sup>20</sup> But there were many cases in which "witnesses," who may not have had any knowledge of the accused or of their behavior during the war, said what they were told to say. The names of these witnesses remain confidential, by law. Their testimony is accessible, but without the names of the witnesses it is virtually worthless. There were cases in which honest witnesses helped to discredit false charges. But ordinarily witnesses said what they were told to say. Some may have done so willingly, but force was also used. The experience of Alexander Matveevich Gvozdyev, who was sent to German-occupied Minsk by the Soviet Ministry of State Security and then arrested, first by the Germans, and later by the Soviets, shows how this worked.<sup>21</sup>

Gvozdyev was the leader of a group of three men who were parachuted into occupied Byelorussia with a short list of contacts in Minsk and instructions to report to Moscow on the situation there. Gvozdyev had a radio set that enabled him to communicate with Moscow; on his way to Minsk he hid it in the forest, close enough to Minsk that he would be able to go to it easily and send or receive messages. The two men who accompanied him, Vladimir Volkov and Nikolai Glochka, were both from Minsk; Gvozdyev was a Russian. Gvozdyev began to distrust Volkov soon after their arrival in occupied territory, because Volkov didn't show up at the assembly point that the three had agreed upon, after they parachuted from the plane that brought them. Encountering Gvozdyev in Minsk, Volkov explained that he had been unable to find the other two and had gone to Minsk on his own. Gvozdyev found this suspicious and reported it to Moscow but was instructed to swallow his doubts and work with Volkov.<sup>22</sup>

Gvozdyev had been given the addresses of three underground apartments in Minsk and the names of three women underground members who lived in them.<sup>23</sup> When he was in Minsk, Gvozdyev stayed with one of the women, Anastasia Veremeichik, who headed an underground group. Through the three women he gathered information about the

situation in Minsk, and relayed it to Moscow. In early March 1942 Volkov established a connection with Rogov, one of the leaders of the underground Military Council; Volkov urged Gvozdyev to meet with Rogov and pointed out that the Military Council included the survivors of several earlier groups of paratroopers that, like Gvozdyev's group, had been sent in from Moscow but had become unable to function because some of their members had been captured by the Germans. With this incentive, Gvozdyev agreed to meet with Rogov, who introduced him to three men whom he had known in Moscow. One of them, Vasili Yushkevich, was the brother of Antonina Anisimova, one of Gvozdyev's contacts, who was at this point living in the countryside, outside Minsk. Yushkevich had been wounded during his encounter with the Germans, and Gvozdyev arranged for him to be taken to his sister's house outside Minsk so he could recuperate, in the hope that he would be of assistance later.

Volkov urged Gvozdyev to meet with Rogov a second time, and after hesitating Gvozdyev agreed to a meeting, which took place in Minsk on March 27, 1942. Volkov accompanied Gvozdyev to the place where the meeting was to take place, a small lane off a larger street, but just before they reached it, Volkov left Gvozdyev, saying that he wanted to drop in on some acquaintances who lived in the area. Gvozdyev turned into the lane, found Rogov standing in front of him, and held out his hand to Rogov. Rogov kept his hands in his pockets. Seven people in civilian clothes surrounded Gvozdyev and forced him into a car that pulled up alongside them. He was taken to the Gestapo headquarters, interrogated, and beaten. An "ochnaya stavka" (arranged confrontation) was held: in front of Gestapo officers, Volkov and Rogov exposed Gvozdyev's Soviet connections, and Rogov in particular urged Gvozdyev to follow his example and collaborate with the Germans. Gvozdyev spat in Rogov's face and called him a scoundrel. Gvozdyev was beaten again and lost consciousness.

When Gvozdyev regained his consciousness, he found himself in a small room. He got up and pushed the door open a little; through the crack he saw two Gestapo men at a table, drinking, and already quite drunk. He realized that he was not in prison, and that if he did not escape, he would be killed. He waited while the two men continued drinking; when they became completely drunk and fell asleep, he quietly entered the room. He realized that he could not leave through the door, because he could hear the steps of the sentry outside it. But there was a window, with no bars on it. Glancing out of it, Gvozdyev could see that he was on the second floor. He grabbed a pistol that was lying on the



table between the two men. He jumped out the window, picked himself up, and began wandering through the streets of Minsk, at times losing consciousness. Finally he found the underground apartment of one of his contacts; he knocked on the door, lost consciousness, and came to himself, later, inside the apartment, having been carried in. Gvozdyev remained in this apartment for two months, recovering from his ordeal. In the early summer of 1942 he went to the countryside to the place where he had earlier sent Yushkevich, the wounded paratrooper whom he had met through Rogov, and the two of them joined Nikitin's brigade, which was based in that area. Nikitin made Gvozdyev commissar of his brigade.

In September 1942 the brigade crossed the front line; both Nikitin and Yushkevich were arrested. Gvozdyev continued to Moscow, to present his report on conditions in occupied Byelorussia, and he was arrested there. His account of having escaped from the Gestapo was not believed, and he was accused of having been recruited to work with German intelligence.<sup>24</sup> Gvozdyev was sent to the Lyubyanka prison, where the Soviet authorities arranged an *ochmaya stavka* between Gvozdyev and Kotikov, one of the members of the Second City Committee arrested in late September 1942. Perhaps Gvozdyev was reminded of the *ochmaya stavka* that he had undergone when he was in the custody of the Gestapo. Gvozdyev had not known Kotikov when he was in Minsk, but Kotikov testified against him, and Gvozdyev was sent to a camp. Gvozdyev continued to insist that he was innocent. His case was eventually reconsidered, apparently in 1959 or shortly before, and Kotikov was questioned about it again. This time Kotikov rescinded everything he had said the first time, and said that everything that he had said when he first testified about Gvozdyev had been false. He explained that the investigator in charge of Gvozdyev's case had forced his testimony on him.<sup>25</sup>

#### REASONS FOR THE SOVIET ATTACK ON THE UNDERGROUND

Why did Ponomarenko and others want to discredit the Minsk underground, and why did they continue their campaign against it for so many years? The simplest answer is that Ponomarenko honestly thought that the Minsk underground was a nest of German spies, and was determined to protect partisan units in the Minsk region from betrayal by its members. Ponomarenko was no doubt informed of the mass arrests of underground members that took place in late September and early October 1942. He no doubt heard that all the members of the City Committee

had been arrested, that Kovalyov and some others were providing the names of other underground members, and that photographs apparently of Kovalyov giving a speech to factory workers in which he urged them to drop their resistance to the Germans appeared in the *Minsker Zeitung*, the German newspaper in Minsk. Ponomarenko may have concluded that the City Committee had been created by the Germans to lure Soviet patriots and lead to just such a mass arrest. Certainly the second failure of the Minsk underground could be used to bolster such a view, as could the first failure, which had similar features: leaders of the Military Council, under arrest, had given the Germans names, and a mass arrest of underground members had followed.

The second failure of the Minsk underground, and especially the reports of Kovalyov's collaboration, lent credence to the perspective that led partisan leaders to refer to "damned Minsk spies" and "the Gestapo City Committee." But Ponomarenko and other partisan leaders who played major roles in promoting this view of the Minsk underground received many reports of the extensive achievements of the Minsk underground, which would have been difficult to square with a view of the underground as run by the Gestapo. Ponomarenko also received a report from Vladimir Kozachyonok, a Soviet agent who had been sent to Minsk to investigate conditions there, arguing that the arrests were not due to the presence of collaborators inside the underground, but rather the result of poor security and the inability of some of those arrested to withstand torture. These reports had no impact on the official view of the Minsk underground. Ponomarenko and his supporters must have had reasons beyond the concerns aroused by the mass arrests to want to discredit the Minsk underground.

Even before the September arrests, Ponomarenko was cool at best toward the Minsk underground. Pruslina and Yezubchik's experience at the Regional Center in the Lyuban swamps was described above. When they arrived, on September 11, 1942, they were warmly welcomed (after it was determined that they were not German spies, but emissaries from the Minsk underground). But the attitude toward them changed sharply when an envoy of Ponomarenko arrived two weeks later. Soon after this Pruslina and Yezubchik were taken to the Voroshilov partisan brigade, closer to Minsk; the commander, Varvashenya, sent them to Minsk to find out about the mass arrests. They went to Minsk, stayed there only one night, and returned to the Voroshilov Brigade, where, Pruslina wrote, she found that the attitude toward the Minsk underground had changed sharply for the worse. If Pruslina's account of the time periods

involved here is correct, Ponomarenko was hostile to the Minsk underground before the mass arrests took place in late September, and Varvashenya's attitude toward the Minsk underground changed considerably earlier than November 20, when Ponomarenko's radiogram was sent out, probably because another message was sent out earlier, either by Ponomarenko or by the Regional Center. It is possible to make too much of these dates; Pruslina's memory might not be exact. Pruslina noticed a dramatic shift in regard to the Minsk underground during the fall of 1942, and that is when the mass arrests took place, followed by Ponomarenko's radiogram to partisan commanders.

It is nevertheless clear that even before the September wave of arrests Ponomarenko was unenthusiastic about establishing a connection with the Minsk underground. The Central Committee was interested in learning about German activities in occupied Byelorussia and sent several groups of paratroopers, most of which were able to function for some time but then, as in the case of Gvozdyev's group, were disabled by arrests. On April 28, 1942, after Gvozdyev had been arrested and his group had ceased to function, another group arrived from Moscow, this one led by S. K. Vishnievsky, who made contact with the Minsk underground and radioed reports on the situation in Byelorussia to Moscow. On May 23 he reported that the Minsk Underground Committee was seeking to establish contact with the CC-CPB (the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party).<sup>26</sup> The City Committee also tried to make contact via the partisans. On August 23 A. L. Kotikov, a member of the City Committee who was in touch with the Starik Brigade, near Minsk, wrote a letter addressed to Ponomarenko and sent it to Pyzhikov, the commander of the Starik Brigade, with the request that he send it on to Ponomarenko himself. Pyzhikov did so and sent with it a letter of his own in which he implicitly endorsed the request from the Minsk underground. The two letters were apparently circulated among members of the Central Committee, and on Pyzhikov's letter Ponomarenko wrote: "1. To Comrade Sergeenko: it is possible to start working with Minsk through this detachment. 2. Comrade Akhimovich: a representative of the CC should be sent to Minsk. Signed, Ponomarenko, October 21, 1942." But no contact was made.<sup>27</sup>

When Pruslina and Yezubchik arrived at the Regional Center, on September 11, 1942, the head of the Regional Committee, V. I. Kozlov, informed Ponomarenko of this by radiogram and asked for instructions. The two women were told that Ponomarenko had been contacted and that he had sent his greetings and asked for detailed information about

Minsk. But Ponomarenko wrote a comment on the radiogram addressed to Kozlov, which also expressed a suspicious attitude toward the Minsk underground. Ponomarenko wrote:

To Comrade Kozlov:

1. It is necessary that your people and agents check rigorously whether they [Pruslina and Yezubchik] have been sent with provocative intent.
2. Send me detailed information about Minsk.
3. Program of agents and underground work.

The request that Pruslina and Yezubchik be thoroughly checked could be read as no more than standard partisan procedure, and perhaps Kozlov took it that way and continued to treat the women with warmth and respect. This was interrupted, however, by the arrival of Ponomarenko's envoy, who treated the women harshly and apparently made it clear that others were to do so as well. It is possible that Ponomarenko adopted the view that the Minsk underground should be treated with suspicion only after the September arrests, but even if that is the case, it is clear that his earlier attitude was not one of great warmth.

If Ponomarenko's hostility to the Minsk underground was based on suspicions raised by the mass arrests of September–October 1942, that hostility should have been softened by a lengthy report submitted by Vladimir Kozachyonok on December 25, 1942, and addressed to Ponomarenko. Kozachyonok noted that he had been sent to Minsk, to report on conditions there, by the CC-CPB, that is, by Ponomarenko. He had returned to Moscow in the wake of the arrests, and his report focused on the arrests and his view of their cause. Kozachyonok wrote that he suspected that Kovalyov began collaborating with the Germans before his arrest (the evidence that he cited, however, was flimsy: he had heard a secondhand report about someone who had a beard and a mustache who was seen associating with Gestapo members, who, he was told, was a member of the City Committee, and he was told that Kovalyov had a beard and a mustache). Despite his suspicions of Kovalyov, Kozachyonok argued that the main problem in the Minsk underground was not the presence of collaborators, but a widely held, cavalier attitude toward security. Members of the City Committee, he wrote, knew each other's addresses. He had attended underground meetings at which many people were present. Many people in the underground had multiple connections to partisan units, and many partisans knew the names of many members of the underground. All of this, he pointed out, violated the main principle of conspiracy, that each member of the underground should have contact with only one other member (or at least, as few as possible). He

recommended that underground work in Minsk should be continued, but that these problems should be corrected.<sup>28</sup>

In order to understand Ponomarenko's attitude toward the Minsk underground it is necessary to remember that he and the other members of the CC-CPB, along with the Byelorussian government, fled from Minsk on the night of June 24–25, within days of the June 22 German attack on Byelorussia. On June 22 the Central Committee met and decided that children should be evacuated from the city, and that regional committees should be established to protect enterprises and ensure the supply of water to the city. But hardly any of this was done, because Minsk was bombed on June 23, and bombing continued the following day, causing fires throughout the city. Some children who were in Pioneer camps outside the city were put on trains or buses, but other than this no evacuation took place. About 150,000 people remained in the city.<sup>29</sup> Some thousands managed to flee eastward, beyond the reach of the Germans, but most were prevented from leaving or did not try. The Communist leaders left the Minsk population with no leadership. No one was left to organize an underground movement.<sup>30</sup>

In her narrative of the development of a hostile attitude toward the Minsk underground, Pruslina wrote that after Stalin's death T. Gorbunov, a leader of the CPB, had told her the following story. When the Byelorussian Communist leaders arrived in Moscow following the German attack on Minsk, a Soviet official asked Gorbunov why the Minsk leaders had left so quickly. Gorbunov said that he had been at the border at the time. When Ponomarenko heard that Gorbunov had been questioned about this, he was very concerned, as, Pruslina noted, he had good reason to be; Pavlov, a Byelorussian commander, had been shot for the same offense. According to Gorbunov, Pruslina wrote, Ponomarenko gathered his staff, and they invented an account of a massive evacuation that they had organized from Minsk, and agreed to spread word of it verbally and to publicize it in the media. An article appeared in *Pravda* in October 1941 describing the organized evacuation from Minsk, and claiming that everyone who had wanted to leave Minsk had been able to do so. People in Minsk learned of this article because it was referred to in German propaganda circulated in Minsk. Pruslina wrote: "Minsk inhabitants asked us, members of the underground, 'Can this be true? If we could have left Minsk and gone to the East, this means we wanted to stay here and live under the invaders' boots. How can [Ponomarenko] have dared to mock us like this?' We, members of the underground, attributed the article to German propaganda."<sup>31</sup> The

hasty departure of the Communist leadership from Minsk, Ponomarenko's fear of being held accountable for it, and his story of an evacuation that did not take place all help to account for Ponomarenko's hostility to the Minsk underground. If such an evacuation had taken place, Communists and other supporters of the Soviets would have left Minsk. There would have been no one there to organize a Communist underground. Evidence that an underground movement had been formed in Minsk, and that it included hundreds of members, embarrassed Ponomarenko, because it raised questions about his story of a massive evacuation.

There was another, related reason for Ponomarenko's hostility to the Minsk underground: he had not authorized it. On December 4, 1942, Ponomarenko wrote, in a letter to a deputy of the NKVD, in Moscow, apparently in response to the report on the Minsk underground that Kotikov had sent the previous August: "We did not leave the underground Party committee, in which Kotikov worked, for underground activity, and it didn't include anyone whom we left to work in Minsk. This underground committee was apparently created by the Germans in order to find and arrest the Party members whom we left to work [in occupied Minsk]." <sup>32</sup> Ponomarenko added that the underground committee in Minsk had created a Military Council that "our comrades left in Minsk (considered provocative)" and that one of its leaders, Rogov, had been sent through the front line, to Soviet territory, by the Gestapo. It seems to have been the case that Rogov, and other members of the Military Council, became collaborators after their arrests. But Ponomarenko had left no one to work in Minsk. Early in the war, when secret resistance groups were formed, many Byelorussian Communists had hesitated to form an underground organization, for fear of the consequences of violating Communist protocol. Their fears were borne out. It had not occurred to them that Ponomarenko would appeal to Communist protocol not only to attack them, but also to divert attention from his failure to provide leadership at the time of the attack.

Ponomarenko's attack on the Minsk underground went largely unchallenged during and after the war, because it coincided with the Soviet assumption that anyone who came under German rule and survived was probably a collaborator. This was the basis for the arrest of those who were captured by the Germans but managed to escape: it was assumed that they had not escaped but been freed after agreeing to work for German intelligence. Some of those who were arrested by the Germans and escaped went into the forest and joined partisan units but did not mention that they had been arrested. This, too, was taken as evidence of

collaboration.<sup>33</sup> Having worked for the Germans during the war was taken as evidence of willing collaboration. In the countryside this was usually not an issue: peasants lived by farming their land. But people who lived in Minsk needed jobs to survive the war. With the Soviet factories and administration gone, and many businesses in Minsk's commercial center destroyed by bombing, the Germans were the main source of work. In regarding employment by the Germans as evidence of collaboration, the Soviets ignored the fact that Minsk residents needed to eat, and implicitly extended the accusation of collaboration to a large proportion of Minsk's wartime population. After the war, the attitude of "guilty until proven innocent" often created obstacles for Byelorussians applying for admission to universities in Moscow or elsewhere in the Soviet Union or for fellowships or jobs.

For those who had participated in the underground, the stakes involved in proving that one had acted as a patriot were particularly high, because any organization that did not have the approval of the Communist Party was, according to the official logic, anti-Soviet, and therefore pro-German. The Communist Party purges of the late 1930s, which had been directed at those accused of disloyalty, were resumed after the war, though on a considerably smaller scale. For those who had been members of the Communist Party before the war, or who had joined it during the war, in partisan units, it was crucial to obtain a renewed party card after the war, not just for the status that it conferred but because it brought some protection against persecution. Failure to obtain a renewed card caused anguish. Pruslina wrote that for a year immediately after the war she served as a member of the Minsk City Committee without a party card. She later found out that Leschenya had stolen references from her file that described her underground work in Minsk in 1941-42, and replaced them with documents that said nothing about her activities during that period; this omission could well have caused the delay in the renewal of her card.<sup>34</sup> The accusations against the Minsk underground had a similar impact. During the last days of December 1954 and the first days of January 1955, a conference of former members of the Minsk underground was held in Minsk at the Museum of the Great Patriotic War. Some did not attend the conference out of fear of being associated with the Minsk underground, but twenty-four former underground members attended; their statements, in most cases descriptions of their underground activity, are included in the record of the conference. The conference was organized with the intention of defending the reputation of the Minsk underground, and there was some discussion of

the treatment that underground members had encountered after the war. Alexandra (Shura) Yanulis, who during the war had recruited Mira Ruderman to serve as a liaison to the imprisoned underground leader Kabushkin, commented:

After the war it turned out that one [former member of the underground] could not get his propiska [official document conveying the right to live in a particular place], another could not get a job, a third could not get re-registered as a Party member. One of my colleagues said, 'Those who remained under the Germans are all traitors.' My children survived but there are those who lost family, children, mothers, siblings, and what did they get instead? We do not ask for anything, but I think each of us has the right to call him/herself an honest person.<sup>35</sup>

The Soviet attitude of "guilty until proven innocent" provided the background for the accusations against the Minsk underground, but the driving force consisted of Ponomarenko's fears and the postwar ambitions of Ponomarenko and his supporters, in particular Kozlov and Leschenya. After the war Kozlov became the main exponent of the view that the Minsk City Committee had been a German operation, and also the main opponent of efforts to gain official recognition of the Minsk underground's legitimacy. In the postwar years Kozlov aligned himself closely with Ponomarenko and rose within the hierarchy of the Byelorussian Communist Party. Leschenya was less closely associated with Ponomarenko after the war and did not rise in the hierarchy to the same extent as Kozlov. Leschenya nevertheless benefited from the official denunciation of the First and Second City Committees. Leschenya had served as the secretary of a Soviet-created Third City Committee, which operated in the forest, far from Minsk. If the First and Second City Committees, of November 1941–September 1942, had been centers of collaboration, then the credit for all of the achievements of the Minsk underground would accrue to the legitimate, officially approved Third City Committee of 1943.

In September 1943 Kozlov and his associate I. A. Bielsky wrote to a secretary of the CC-CPB, Akhimovich, who was in occupied Byelorussia, urging the creation of a third Minsk Underground Committee.<sup>36</sup> Kozlov and Bielsky urged the appointment of Leschenya as secretary of the committee, and they named others who should be made members of the committee. They said they had picked out a location for the committee and would describe it to Akhimovich in person. All of this was approved and carried out. The Third Minsk Committee was established on October 24, 1943, not in Minsk but in the forest, in the Pukhovichi district,



seventy kilometers southeast of Minsk. The Third Minsk Underground Committee came to be called the Forest Committee. Leschenya, the head of the committee, had never been in Minsk. Two other members of the committee were from Minsk, but no one on the committee visited the city during the war. Even if members of the committee had been familiar with the situation in Minsk up to this time, they would have had a hard time directing underground activity there at this point, because conditions in Minsk were changing rapidly. Most of the underground had left for partisan units in the forest, and many others were following their example. The initiative for sabotage, and other forms of resistance, was coming mostly from partisan units outside the city, which were sending liaisons into the city to distribute underground literature encouraging sabotage and urging people to join the partisans, and promoting the formation of underground groups and engaging in their own acts of sabotage. Earlier, underground literature had been printed in Minsk and sent to the forest; now it was being printed in the forest, by the partisans, and brought into Minsk.

Despite the shift in initiative, from the city to the forest, resistance in Minsk was escalating. On June 24, 1943, the German newspaper the *Minsker Zeitung* carried a letter by an employee of a German firm in Minsk, Ernst Westfal, to an acquaintance back in Germany, describing the situation in Minsk in bleak terms. Westfal wrote:

Partisans are everywhere, even in the city of Minsk. In the last months many Germans have been killed in the streets. You can't travel along the Vilna-Minsk highway. You can move in the direction of Baranovichi only escorted by tanks. Four weeks ago my truck was stolen. Moreover, the driver loaded his family in the truck and left for the partisans. This is everyday life. On June 22 a mine was planted in the city theater and towards the end of the play the mine blew up. As a result more than 30 people were killed and about 100 were wounded. Then they blew up an electric power station and the steam tank at the dairy plant. In the soldiers' cinema and hostel three weeks ago they found several bombs. Last Saturday partisans attempted to blow up my bakery, but the bomb didn't go off. On Sunday night a car was blown up near the officers' hostel; the same happened to the steamer near the water pump.<sup>37</sup>

The Forest Committee sent liaisons to Minsk with underground newspapers and leaflets, and these liaisons organized underground groups. But in its efforts to direct underground work in Minsk the Forest Committee was competing with the Regional Committee and also with another official body, the Minsk Rural Underground District Committee. The Regional Committee, headed by Kozlov, was in closer contact with

Ponomarenko than the Forest Committee and therefore had easier access to resources. The Minsk Rural Committee had ties with the partisan units around Minsk that were encouraging and engaging in resistance activity in the city. The Regional Committee and the Rural Committee were in regular contact with each other, while the Forest Committee often found itself out of the loop. Pruslina, who had been assigned to work with the Forest Committee as an editor of *The Minsk Bolshevik*, the committee's publication, discovered that it was easier to get copies of *The Minsk Bolshevik* to other parts of Byelorussia than to Minsk, because the Regional Committee and the Rural Committee wanted to maintain their hold on Minsk and did what they could to keep *The Minsk Bolshevik* out. Just before the liberation Leschenya sent Pruslina to partisan detachments in the region to make lists of partisans from Minsk. When she was halfway done, Leschenya told her to stop and said sadly that her efforts had been worthless, because he had learned that he had no chance of becoming the secretary of the Minsk City Committee. He was right: when they entered liberated Minsk, they found that someone else had already been named secretary of the committee. Leschenya continued after the war to discredit the First and Second City Committees in occupied Minsk, to claim credit for underground activity in Minsk throughout the war, and to undermine the efforts of Pruslina and others toward the recognition of the Minsk underground of 1941-42.<sup>38</sup>

#### THE REHABILITATION OF THE UNDERGROUND

In July 1945 Minsk celebrated the anniversary of its liberation. A commission, which included V. I. Kozlov, now the chair of the Minsk Regional Committee, and others from the City Committee, drafted a statement for this event that said: "From the first days of the war the inhabitants of Minsk heroically resisted the German occupants. Their struggle was led not by the First or Second City Committees (1941-2) but by the Forest or Third City Committee (1943)."<sup>39</sup> Even this statement made Ponomarenko so angry that he reprimanded I. Bielsky, the chair of the postwar Minsk City Committee, so severely that Bielsky became ill from fright. The commission had also recommended that Minsk be given the title of Hero City, an honor that was at the time being bestowed by the Soviet authorities on cities where resistance to the Germans had been particularly fierce; Ponomarenko was a major opponent of this proposal. A group of former members of the Minsk underground asked that they be allowed to hold a meeting, and Bielsky approved their request. Given

the charge surrounding the issue of the Minsk underground, and the dangers involved in ruffling the feathers of a high Soviet official such as Ponomarenko, who had ties to L. P. Tsanava, the head of the Byelorussian NKVD, and also to Stalin, both the request and Bielsky's approval of it took considerable courage. The meeting was held in June 1945; Bielsky assigned Molochko, a member of the Minsk City Committee, to chair it. Thirty-five former members of the Minsk underground attended the meeting; they recalled the struggles of the underground during the war and discussed ways of achieving official recognition of the underground's efforts.<sup>40</sup>

The underground members decided to begin by establishing a commission that would collect statements from underground members of their wartime activities. Pruslina was chosen as the head of the committee charged with gathering these statements, writing a report based on them, and submitting it to the Minsk City Committee; the committee included Smolar, Yezubchik, and others. The members of the committee gathered information from other underground members, and each wrote his or her own report; they were in the process of drafting a general report when Kozlov demanded all the material. No more meetings were held, and Pruslina never saw the documents again. In 1986, when, with Stalin long dead and his postwar circle of supporters no longer in power, it had become possible to discuss this history openly, Molochko told Pruslina that the reason no more meetings were held was because he had received an order from above to "stop the fuss with the Minsk underground."<sup>41</sup>

Pruslina and the other underground members persisted. Having failed to get the support of the Minsk City Committee or the Minsk Regional Committee, they decided to appeal to higher authorities. In 1949 they sent an appeal directly to Stalin and got a letter in response saying that the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party had been ordered to study the issue and make a decision about it. The CC-CPB appointed a commission that included Kozlov, Tsanava, and other high Soviet Byelorussian officials. The commission did nothing. In 1954 members of the underground again requested permission to hold a meeting; the result was the weeklong conference of underground members in late December 1954 and early January 1955.

That such a conference was held at the Museum of the Great Patriotic War, in Minsk, conferred some degree of legitimacy on it. Stalin's death made it possible for underground members to speak more freely

than they might have otherwise. No high Soviet officials attended the meeting, but Leschenya, now a member of the Minsk City Committee, made a list of members of the Minsk underground, and each of them was given a piece of paper affirming that they had participated in the Minsk Communist underground. Pruslina and the other underground members were not satisfied with this, because it did not address the issue of the legitimacy of the First and Second Minsk City Committees. They appealed to the City Committee for a statement rescinding the charge of collaboration not just from individual surviving members of the underground, but from the Minsk City Committees of 1941–42. Leschenya responded that there had been no Communist Underground City Committees in Minsk during the war, and that the Gestapo had initiated the Minsk underground. So according to the official view, Pruslina and some other underground members had been sincere anti-Nazis, but they had been caught up in an operation run by the Germans.

In 1956 the underground members made another effort to gain official recognition of the Minsk underground. They sent a letter to Khrushchev, now Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR (CPUSSR), pointing out that in 1945 the Byelorussian Communist Party had been ordered to address the question of the Minsk underground, but that nothing had been done, and that their repeated efforts to revive the process had been blocked by Ponomarenko and Tsanova, “Beria’s man in Byelorussia.”<sup>42</sup> The CC-CPB was again ordered to deal with the question, and a commission was appointed, chaired by Kozlov. Members of the underground gave him documents, but he told them that he wouldn’t read the documents or otherwise investigate the question because there hadn’t been an underground movement in Minsk, he hadn’t appointed any underground leaders, and everything that took place there had been initiated by the Gestapo.<sup>43</sup>

In 1958 the members of the underground tried again. I. D. Budayev, one of their number, wrote a letter to the Presidium of the CC-CPUSSR, describing Ponomarenko and Kozlov as opponents of the Minsk underground and arguing that the investigation of the Minsk underground, which the Soviet authorities in Moscow had ordered, had been continually blocked in Minsk. The authorities in Minsk received a letter from the Soviet Presidium, insisting that they must address this problem and promising to supervise the process. Again, a commission was established, chaired by Kozlov. A meeting was held, underground members gave speeches, and the proceedings were recorded. Afterwards Kozlov locked

the records in his safe, and nothing further happened. The underground members appealed again to the CC-CPUSSR. Finally, K. T. Mazurov, who had succeeded Ponomarenko as the Secretary of the CC-CPB, revived the commission on the Minsk underground and appointed Gorbunov as the chair, making Kozlov merely one member of the commission among others. Gorbunov was the CC member who had previously alerted Pruslina to Ponomarenko's anxiety about having fled Byelorussia so quickly at the beginning of the war, and about his having invented the story that he had organized an evacuation from Minsk.<sup>44</sup>

On September 7, 1959, Gorbunov chaired a meeting of the reorganized commission on the Minsk underground. Underground members submitted reports on the activities of the Minsk underground under the First and Second Committees. Gorbunov gave a speech in which he said that no evacuation had taken place in Minsk and that an underground movement had been organized, led by the First and Second Minsk City Committees. He described the underground's achievements in conducting sabotage, creating and running an underground press, and sending people and supplies to partisan units. He argued that the failures of late March and late September 1942 had occurred because the underground was a mass movement, German agents had been able to gather information about it, and some of those arrested had broken under torture. He argued that Soviet officials in Moscow who were misinformed about the situation in Minsk had taken these failures as evidence that the Minsk underground was a German operation, and that Ponomarenko in particular had thoughtlessly concluded that the Minsk underground was false and had conveyed this view in his radiogram to the partisans without taking the trouble to investigate further. He gave the names of underground members falsely arrested as collaborators.<sup>45</sup>

Members of the committee spoke in favor of a full rehabilitation of the First and Second City Committees, and even Kozlov was pressured into joining in the unanimous vote in favor of it. Soon after this Kozlov managed to get the decision nullified from above, but the underground members appealed to Moscow to reinstate the decision. In the fall of 1959 the Presidium of the CPB voted to recognize and rehabilitate the Minsk underground of 1941-42. First Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party, Mazurov, announced this decision at the Twenty-Fourth Assembly of the Party in February 1960. A group of researchers at the Institute of History of the Communist Party of Byelorussia produced a history of the Minsk underground; Gorbunov's name was listed as first author. This piece was used as the basis for a popularized

and more rhetorical version, published in the journal *The Byelorussian Communist*, of which excerpts were published in the Minsk newspaper *Sovietskaya Byelorussia*.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, the cases of members of the Minsk underground who had been arrested for collaboration were being reconsidered, and 113 had been exonerated by 1962. In 1974, Minsk was awarded the title of Hero City, the last of the Soviet cities to be given this honor.

## Strategies of Resistance Elsewhere

### *The Kovno Ghetto*

The Minsk ghetto was one of five ghettos in German-occupied eastern Europe in which major resistance movements formed. Minsk was the only one of the five located in the now-occupied original territories of the Soviet Union. Warsaw, the farthest west of the five, was within the western part of Poland that the Germans took over on September 1, 1939 (see map 2). Bialystok, Kovno, and Vilna were all part of the territory occupied by the Soviets under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Vilna was not officially annexed by the Soviets until 1940). Following the German attack on the Soviet Union, Vilna and Kovno, as well as Minsk, fell within the German administrative unit of Reichskommissariat Ostland (Ukraine, to the south, was designated as Reichskommissariat Ukraine). Bialystok fell within an area designated as the Generalbezirk Bialystok, an administrative unit covering the Bialystok-Grodno area. Warsaw was located within the General Government, the borders of which corresponded roughly to the previous borders of independent Poland.

These administrative categories had very real consequences for Jews in the ghettos of eastern Europe: the Germans first embarked upon their policy of systematic extermination of Jews in the occupied Soviet territories (Reichskommissariat Ostland and Ukraine) before doing the same in the General Government, and the pace of extermination was faster there. But Reichskommissariat Ostland cut across the line between territories that had been under Soviet rule since 1924 and areas that had been part of independent Poland during the same period. The Jews of

Warsaw, Bialystok, Vilna, and Kovno had strong cultural and organizational ties. By the time of the war Minsk Jews inhabited what in many ways had become a world unto itself, because life in the Soviet Union for the past two decades had differed so radically from life inside it, and because there had been little contact between Jews inside and outside the Soviet Union.

The sharply different twentieth-century histories of the Jewish communities of Poland and Lithuania and those of Soviet Byelorussia shaped the cultures of the ghettos, and ghetto resistance. Outside the Soviet Union, Zionism, in versions ranging from right to left, was a major influence during the interwar years; inside the Soviet Union, Zionism had been outlawed and had ceased to exist as more than a memory. The Jewish Bund had a large following in interwar Poland; it too had ceased to exist in the Soviet Union, though it had remained in existence somewhat longer than had the Zionist organizations. Many Jews, especially young Jews, entered the ghettos of Warsaw, and later Bialystok, Vilna, and Kovno, as members of Jewish organizations that stretched across Poland and Lithuania. In each of these ghettos, more or less the same Jewish organizations were involved in forming underground movements, and in debates over what form resistance should take. Some members of left Zionist groups, and also of the Bund, managed to remain in contact with comrades in other ghettos. Such contact helped to create a common strategy of resistance that revolved around mobilizing revolt inside the ghettos.

These connections were strongest among Jews in the Vilna, Bialystok, and Warsaw ghettos who belonged to youth organizations that played prominent roles in forming movements of resistance. Communication between these three ghettos and the Kovno ghetto took place but much less frequently, and its impact on resistance in the Kovno ghetto was much less pronounced; here the strategy that was ultimately supported by the underground as a whole was that of sending Jews to the forest. The Minsk ghetto remained entirely out of this loop: the underground movement in the Minsk ghetto had no contact with the underground movements in any of the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania. For leaders of the Minsk ghetto underground, the first news of resistance in any of these ghettos was a rumor about the Warsaw ghetto uprising that reached them in the forest, after they had joined partisan units.<sup>1</sup>

I conclude this book with an account of the Kovno ghetto underground and its efforts to send Jews to the forest, because it forms a useful point of comparison with the Minsk ghetto underground. In contrast to the



approximately 10,000 Jews who reached partisan units from the Minsk ghetto, about 300 Jews reached partisan units from the Kovno ghetto. There were geographical, and logistical, differences between the two ghettos. The Kovno ghetto, like the Minsk ghetto, was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, but sentries were stationed at intervals along it. In order to escape it one had to either find a place that was not observable from the nearest sentry point or bribe a sentry. Kovno was not, like Minsk, within a day's walk of the partisan forest. It was not possible for residents of the Kovno ghetto to leave on their own, walk to the forest, and look for partisan units to join. But there were forests within a few days' journey, and by 1943 there were partisan units in the forests. But the most important difference between the two ghettos was that the Minsk ghetto underground was part of a united underground movement from early in the war; the underground, and many ghetto Jews outside the underground, received substantial assistance from outside the ghetto. In the Kovno ghetto, the Communist underground was repeatedly disappointed in its search for external allies; members of the underground did not find a group able to connect them to the partisans until the fall of 1943. Due to the weakness and isolation of underground forces outside the ghetto, they were only able to send limited numbers to the forest. Telling the Kovno story in the context of a study of the Minsk underground highlights the importance of external allies: links to a strong underground organization, and a dense network of ties between Jews in the ghetto and non-Jews outside it.

The alternative to the strategy of sending Jews to the forest was that of mobilizing ghetto revolt, and this was the strategy adopted by the Warsaw, Vilna, and Bialystok ghetto undergrounds, though with very different outcomes. In the Warsaw ghetto the underground initiated a revolt that the ghetto population as a whole joined, in a battle that ended only with the physical destruction of the ghetto. In the Bialystok ghetto the underground organization rose in revolt, but the ghetto population did not join it. In the Vilna ghetto, despite the intentions of the underground organization, no ghetto revolt took place. Before telling the story of the Kovno ghetto I touch upon the outlines of this history, the reasons that the Vilna, Warsaw, and Bialystok underground movements chose the strategy of ghetto revolt, and the reasons that its outcome differed so widely. Because the story of the Warsaw ghetto is so widely known, ghetto resistance has come to be equated with ghetto revolt. The underground members who argued for ghetto revolt understood that the Germans meant to exterminate the Jews; they believed that for the

underground to send its members out of the ghetto was dishonorable, and in the case of the Warsaw ghetto, going to the forest was not a practical option for more than a few. But where it was possible to send significant numbers to the forest, there were reasons to choose this approach.

Most underground members who argued for ghetto revolts assumed that they would die in the revolts that they advocated. They believed that ghetto revolts were necessary to uphold the honor of the Jewish people, as statements of protest to the world and for history. These aims were more important to the young underground members who advocated revolt than their own survival. But most ghetto inhabitants did not share this idealism, or to the degree that they did, they were less willing to act upon it than were the members of the underground movements. Most ghetto inhabitants hoped that somehow they would survive the war, and they were reluctant or unwilling to engage in revolts unless they were convinced that their only choice was dying with or without resisting. The populations of the Vilna and Bialystok ghettos clung to the hope of survival to the very end. The strategy of sending Jews to the forest had the advantage that it attached resistance to the hope of survival.

The Minsk and Kovno ghettos differed from the Vilna, Warsaw, and Bialystok ghettos not only in that the Kovno ghetto remained partially, and the Minsk ghetto entirely, outside the network of communications sustained among the other three ghettos from September 1941 through the first half of 1942, but also with respect to the character of the official ghetto leadership in the Minsk and Kovno ghettos (the Judenrat and the Eltstenrat, respectively) and the Warsaw, Bialystok and Vilna ghettos (in Warsaw and Bialystok, the Judenrat; and in Vilna, Jacob Gens, the head of the Jewish Police). The leaders of the Warsaw and Bialystok Judenrats, and in Vilna, Gens, were committed to strategies of collaboration, in Gens's case, at least, out of the belief that more Jews would be saved through negotiation and cooperation with the Germans than through resistance. The Minsk ghetto Judenrat was part of the ghetto underground, the Kovno ghetto Eltstenrat supported the ghetto underground, and both avoided collaboration as far as possible (in the case of Minsk, until the Germans placed collaborators on the Judenrat). In the Vilna, Bialystok, and Warsaw ghettos, underground movements had no choice but to challenge the ghetto authorities for leadership of the ghetto; only in Warsaw did the ghetto underground win this contest. In the Minsk and Kovno ghettos, the official leadership worked with the underground, and no such contest was necessary. In both cases, the

underground movements won broad support from the ghetto population. In both cases, underground efforts to send Jews to the forest were a major factor in popular support.

#### THE STRATEGY OF GHETTO REVOLT

The Vilna ghetto underground pioneered the united underground organization and also an analysis and a strategy that were eventually adopted by underground movements in the Warsaw and Bialystok ghettos as well. In the early months of the occupation the Germans massacred tens of thousands of Vilna Jews, both before and after the establishment of two adjacent ghettos on September 6, 1941. By the turn of 1942 only approximately 20,000 Jews remained alive out of the approximately 57,000 in Vilna at the time of the German invasion. On New Year's Eve 1942 a secret meeting of members of the left Zionist youth organizations was held; the call to the meeting, drafted by Abba Kovner of Hashomer Hatzair, argued that the massacres in Vilna and the ghetto were steps toward a German plan of genocide, and called for armed resistance. On January 21 a united underground organization, the United Partisan Organization (usually referred to as the FPO, its Yiddish acronym), was created with a leadership body representing left Zionists, right Zionists, and Communists (the Bundists joined later). Envoys to other ghettos carried news of the Vilna massacres, the message that the Germans intended genocide, and a plea that united ghetto underground organizations be formed. In each ghetto some young people, especially the left Zionists, were open to this argument; most of the older leaders resisted it.

This raised the question of strategy: to go to the forest and join the emergent partisan movement, or to lead revolts in the ghettos. Warsaw was too far from partisan territory for the forest option to have been a practical possibility. In the Vilna and Bialystok ghettos, both closer to partisan territory, these options were debated. In the Vilna ghetto the dominant view was that going to the forest meant abandoning the ghetto population, and that the defense of Jewish honor called for a ghetto revolt, which would send a message to the world and make a statement for history. In the Bialystok ghetto some expressed this view; others argued that more effective resistance could take place in the forests. Some supported doing both at once: building a Jewish presence in the forest that could provide support at the time of a ghetto revolt. But little was done to create such a presence. Though some hoped for a simultaneous revolt outside the ghetto, making it possible for many to break through the

ghetto walls and escape, most who argued in favor of a ghetto revolt expected to die in the course of it.

Mass revolts did not take place in either the Vilna or the Bialystok ghetto. In the Vilna ghetto, the FPO learned that it lacked popular support when, in July 1943, the Germans demanded that the FPO's Communist leader, Itzik Wittenberg, be turned over, and threatened to destroy the ghetto if this were not done. The Germans had arrested members of a small Communist underground outside the ghetto, with which Wittenberg had been connected, and had obtained his name. The FPO considered mounting a revolt in his defense, but the outcry in the ghetto to turn him over made clear how little support there was among the ghetto population for such a revolt. On the advice of his comrades, Wittenberg turned himself over. When the Germans and their assistants entered the ghetto on September 1 and began seizing ghetto residents, FPO members gathered, as planned, in the FPO headquarters and in positions on the other side of the same street with the intention of engaging the Germans in battle. But FPO members were aware that an attack on the Germans would not incite a ghetto revolt, and the battle fizzled. Over the following days and weeks FPO members left for the forest, to join partisan units.

In the Bialystok ghetto there were for some time two underground organizations, one consisting of groups farther to the left, the other of groups farther to the right; Hashomer Hatzair created a link by joining the two. On February 5–12, 1943, the Germans and their assistants held an "Aktion" in the ghetto anticipated by the underground. The left underground organization rose in a revolt, which the right underground organization did not join, and which was defeated. In the wake of the revolt a call for underground unity led to the formation of a united underground organization, which rose in revolt on August 16, 1943, when the Germans and their assistants entered the ghetto to deport ghetto residents to death camps and work camps. But the revolt did not spread beyond members of the underground, few of whom survived.

In both the Vilna and the Bialystok ghettos popular attitudes were influenced by the behavior and arguments of the official ghetto leadership: in the Vilna ghetto, Jacob Gens, the head of the Jewish Police; and in the Bialystok ghetto, Ephraim Barasz, the head of the Judenrat. Both argued that the Germans needed Jews' labor, that resistance endangered the ghetto, and that obeying German orders and working hard were the best ways of averting massacres. Both collaborated with the Germans, negotiating over numbers of Jews to be turned over, and placing the number

agreed upon in the hands of the Germans. But in both ghettos those who survived these “Aktionen” clung to the hope that they and members of their families would somehow survive the war. Few outside the underground shared its idealism; most regarded a ghetto revolt as a sure path to death, and an invitation to the Germans to destroy the ghetto. It is difficult to fault ghetto residents for holding onto the hope that somehow the Germans would be defeated before they were killed. But the underground strategy of ghetto revolt failed to take such hopes into account and thus failed to gain the support of the populations of the Vilna and Bialystok ghettos.

In the Warsaw ghetto the efforts of the underground led to a mass uprising, because by the time the Germans entered the ghetto to destroy it, ghetto residents who had survived to that point had become convinced that the Germans would eventually enter the ghetto to destroy it, that survival was not possible, and that the choices were resistance or failure to resist. The “Great Deportation,” which lasted from July 22 to September 12, 1942, reduced what had been a population of approximately 130,000 on the eve of the deportation to approximately 60,000. On January 18, 1943, the Germans again entered the ghetto and conducted a second deportation, lasting four days. This time members of the Jewish Fighting Organization (known by its Polish acronym as the ZOB) entered the line of those being deported with their weapons and at an opportune moment attacked the German guards escorting the line. The ensuing battle allowed many Jews in the line to escape. This battle, and the ZOB’s attack on Judenrat members and Jewish police who had egregiously aided the Germans in the Great Deportation, gained respect for the ZOB among the surviving ghetto population.

The ZOB became, in effect, the leadership of the Warsaw ghetto. Few Jews in the Warsaw ghetto had any doubt but that the Germans would come again to destroy the ghetto. The great majority of those who had survived the Great Deportation were relatively young; some had been exempted, due to their work for the Germans, while others had hid. The ghetto was now virtually empty of children and older people; most of those who remained had lost their families. For many if not most, anger and the desire for revenge may have taken precedence over the desire to survive. The ZOB leadership did its utmost to find support from outside the ghetto, but the leadership of the Home Army, the main body of the Polish resistance, offered virtually none. In the absence of such support, escape from the ghetto during or after a revolt would be extremely difficult. Despite this, when the Germans again entered the ghetto on April

19, 1943, and the 600 to 800 men and women of the underground (including the ZOB and a smaller organization now united with it) rose in rebellion, the ghetto population as a whole joined the revolt, using whatever they could find at hand to attack the Germans. It was more than a month before the Germans gained control of the ghetto.

None of the underground organizations in the ghettos of Poland or Lithuania had substantial allies outside the ghetto; none would have been able to send any substantial proportion of the ghetto population out of the ghetto. The question was ultimately whether it was better to remain in the ghetto and make a statement that would reverberate beyond the ghetto, or to send what would inevitably be a small number out of the ghetto to fight under the more favorable conditions of the forest. In the Kovno ghetto the latter strategy prevailed, partly because that was what the young people in the underground wanted, Zionists as well as Communists. The obstacles to reaching the forest from the Kovno ghetto were considerably greater than from the Minsk ghetto.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KOVNO GHETTO

The Germans took the city of Kovno on June 24, 1941. The Soviets, who had occupied the city since the summer of 1940, had left two days earlier in the immediate wake of the German attack on the Soviet Union that took place on June 22. Some Lithuanian nationalists welcomed the Germans, believing that they would support Lithuanian independence. Some also agreed with the Nazi program, including its anti-Semitism. During the two days before the arrival of the Germans, groups of Lithuanians engaged in pogroms. By the time the Germans arrived, thousands of Jews had been murdered. In the days following the Germans' arrival, Lithuanians, with German approval, killed some 800 more Kovno Jews. These pogroms, with which the German occupation began and conducted by local Lithuanians, foreshadowed the violence to come.

Lithuanians generally, but especially Lithuanian nationalists, had chafed under Soviet rule. Communists supported the Soviets, but the Lithuanian Communist Party was quite small, and it had little influence. The Lithuanian Communist Party had a disproportionately large Jewish membership, no doubt at least in part due to the Lithuanian Communist Party's strong opposition to anti-Semitism. But the Lithuanian Jews who belonged to, or supported, the Communist Party constituted a tiny proportion of Lithuanian Jews. As in Poland, Jews in Lithuania tended to vote farther left than non-Jews, but it was Social Democracy,

not Communism, that received Jewish support. In Lithuania, as in Poland, very few Jews were admirers of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, most Jews regarded Soviet rule as vastly preferable to German, and some, realizing that Lithuania was sure to come under the rule of one of these powers, had welcomed the Soviet takeover in 1940. This, along with the visibility of Jews hired in the administrative structure established by the Soviets, identified Jews in the eyes of the local population with what became a hated Soviet occupation. Many blamed the Jews for the deportations to the east that took place during the last months of Soviet rule, despite the proportionately large number of Jews, especially Zionists, included in these deportations. Resentment against the Jews resulting from the Soviet occupation only added to the existing store of anti-Semitic sentiments. When the Germans entered Lithuania, they found many people receptive to their anti-Semitic and anti-Soviet rhetoric.

Furthermore, during the first few days of the war, before the Germans arrived, many Lithuanian Communists and others likely to be targeted by the Germans fled. The Germans elevated pro-fascist nationalists, previously suppressed by the Soviets, into positions of prestige, if not actual influence. Thus many of those most likely to defend or ally with the Jews left in the early days of the war, while those most likely to attack the Jews had gained a new degree of public legitimacy.

On July 10, 1941, the Germans announced that by August 15 the Jews of Kovno would be required to move to Vilijampole, a poor community across the river from Kovno, where both Jews and Lithuanians lived. Many Jews in this neighborhood had been killed in the pogroms that took place at the beginning of the war, and some houses stood vacant as a result. Lithuanians living in this area were ordered to move out. A Judenrat, in this case called the Eltstenrat, or Council of Elders, was organized, with Elkhanan Elkes, a mainstream Zionist, as its head. The ghetto was surrounded with barbed wire, and sentries were posted at intervals along it. About 33,000 Kovno Jews were now crowded in an area that had previously contained a population of about 4,000.

During the fall of 1941 the Germans repeatedly took large numbers of Jews out of the ghetto to the Ninth Fort, one of a ring of nineteenth-century forts surrounding the city, which the Germans used as a prison and death camp. As in Vilna, the Germans attempted to hide their massacres from the ghetto population by using a smaller, separate ghetto as a way station: they repeatedly marched thousands of Jews from the large

ghetto to the small ghetto, and from there to their deaths at the Ninth Fort. On August 18 the Germans removed 534 intellectuals from the ghetto. On October 4 they took about 1,800 inhabitants of the small ghetto to the Ninth Fort. On October 28 they marched 9,200 inhabitants of the large ghetto to the small ghetto, and from it to the Ninth Fort. On October 4 the Germans took the rest of the population of the small ghetto to the Ninth Fort and destroyed the small ghetto. Despite the Germans' efforts to disguise their actions, news trickled back about the fate of those removed from the ghetto.

After the massacres of the fall of 1941 a "quiet period" ensued, which lasted until the fall of 1943. During this period the Germans refrained from conducting more massacres, left the *Eltstenrat* to govern the ghetto, and seemed mostly concerned with wringing labor out of the ghetto population. Jews were marched out of the ghetto every morning to perform work for the Germans. Many worked repairing a military airfield damaged by German bombs, a few miles south of Kovno; others worked in the city or in workshops inside the ghetto. Those who worked in the city were in the best position to bring smuggled food into the ghetto or to make contacts outside the ghetto. But they, like those who worked at the airfield, were likely to be searched when they reentered through the ghetto gate, and those caught bringing food into the ghetto could be beaten or worse.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE ZIONIST UNDERGROUND

Two underground movements took shape within the Kovno ghetto, one led by Zionists, the other by Communists. Many of the members of the *Eltstenrat*, including Elkhanan Elkes, its chair, were members of Zionist organizations. The *Eltstenrat* mostly concerned itself with organizing the labor of Jews, inside and outside the ghetto, and providing what services they could for the ghetto population, given the very scant resources at their disposal. A welfare office collected clothes for the most needy in the ghetto, a hospital was established, and two schools operated in the ghetto until the Germans closed them down in August 1942. The *Eltstenrat* also oversaw a ghetto library, until in February 1942 the Germans confiscated all books in the ghetto. Some members of the *Eltstenrat* used their positions to arrange relatively advantageous work positions for family members or members of their organizations. Elkes, however, was universally respected for his efforts to help the ghetto population.



A large number of Zionist organizations functioned semilegally in the ghetto, focusing at first on social and educational functions for their members, and also engaging in efforts to improve ghetto welfare. Later, as some of these organizations turned to resistance activity, they continued to use their social, educational, and welfare functions as a cover. Two umbrella organizations of Zionist organizations were formed in the ghetto. The first was Irgun Brit Zion (Organization of the Covenant of Zion), which was dominated by the mainstream General Zionists and which excluded the extreme left-wing Zionist organizations, in particular Hashomer Hatzair. Later, a more inclusive Zionist network was created, called Matzok (its name was the acronym for Zionist Center, Vilijampole-Kovno; in Hebrew, the feminine form of the word *matzok* translates as “distress”). Matzok included Hashomer Hatzair and other left-wing Zionist organizations.<sup>3</sup>

In the Vilna, Warsaw, and Bialystok ghettos, young Zionists, especially left-wing Zionists, had quickly separated themselves from the adult Zionist organizations, because of the young people’s unwillingness to follow the cautious and conciliatory approach advocated by their elders. The underground movements in these ghettos consisted overwhelmingly of young people, in their teens or early twenties. In the Kovno ghetto, the differences among Zionists followed organizational more than generational lines, and these differences never became sharp enough to disrupt cooperation among the various groups. Over the summer and fall of 1943, as news of German military defeats reached the ghetto, and as the Germans tightened their control over the ghetto, a ghetto-wide underground network was created, within which the Communists took the lead.

The Marxist-Zionist youth of Hashomer Hatzair played an intermediary role between the Zionists and the Communists. Some young Zionists advocated organizing an uprising in the ghetto, but this was more a stance, taken in opposition to the Communist strategy of sending Jews to the forest, than a concrete plan. An uprising in the ghetto was never seriously pursued. As the united, Communist-led underground organization began sending Jews to the forest, young Zionists clamored to be included. Older Zionists in the ghetto administration worked with the Communists to support the groups going to the forest by arranging for the cooperation of the Jewish Police and bribing German officials to stay away from the ghetto gate at particular times. Meanwhile, the Zionists constructed malinas in the ghetto. Many Zionists, along with others, later died in these malinas when, on July 8, 1944, the Germans entered

the ghetto, deported those whom they could force to leave, and set the ghetto on fire.

#### THE COMMUNIST UNDERGROUND

In the early days of the ghetto, a number of Communists called together other Communists, and some Communist sympathizers who were not party members, to form underground groups. One of these groups began to serve as a magnet for others; its leader was Chaim Yelin, a young man who had been well known before the war as both a Yiddish writer and a Communist Party activist. For Yelin and the others in this expanding underground circle, making contacts outside the ghetto, with Communists or others whom they could trust, was the highest priority. Police-men were posted at intervals along the fence, but there were guards who were open to being bribed, and there were places along the fence that were difficult for the nearest guards to observe. Yelin frequently slipped under the wire. He was attired in clothes collected by the underground for his expeditions into Kovno that made him appear to be a respectable middle-class young man so as to deflect suspicions that he might be from the ghetto. On one of his first trips out of the ghetto, Yelin established a connection with a group of escaped Red Army prisoners of war who had not managed to leave the city before the Germans arrived. On Yelin's subsequent trips a liaison—an equally well-dressed young woman—would meet him at the fence, and Yelin and the young woman would stroll across the bridge and through Kovno arm in arm, talking and laughing, as if they were lovers.<sup>4</sup>

Yelin's attempt to establish an ongoing connection with this group was one of the first of what was to be a series of disappointments. The group that Yelin had discovered was preparing to leave for the forest, to form a partisan unit. A group was organized in the ghetto to go with them. But the Germans discovered the group in the city, and they had to leave before the group from the ghetto could join them. Underground members in the ghetto waited for instructions to join them in the forest but never received any. They later found out that upon leaving Kovno the group of former prisoners of war had encountered police, and all had been killed.<sup>5</sup>

On December 31, 1941, all the Communist and pro-Communist underground groups in the ghetto met, in secret, to form a unified organization, called the Anti-Fascist and Partisan Organization, but widely referred to in the ghetto, even among Zionists, as the Anti-Fascist Organization, or

just the Organization. Its aims were to organize fighting groups to be sent to partisan bases in the forest and to mobilize resistance among the ghetto population, mostly through sabotage in German factories and workshops and wherever else it might be possible to do damage to the German war effort. The Anti-Fascist Organization consisted of small cells linked through their representatives to a central committee of five, later expanded to seven. Yelin was chosen as secretary. The leadership of the Anti-Fascist Organization remained intact until October 1943, when viable connections outside the ghetto were finally established, and underground members and leaders began to be sent to the forest.

A series of acts of sabotage took place in places where Jews worked outside the ghetto. Members of the Anti-Fascist Organization or others assisting them were responsible for most. One member of the organization who worked at the railroad yard set three wagons of a German train, bound for the front, on fire; the wagons were destroyed. An explosion took place in a German arsenal located in the Fifth Fort, almost certainly caused intentionally by members of the organization who worked there. Two members were killed in the explosion and another lost his hand. The Germans executed all the members of the Jewish brigade working in the arsenal.<sup>6</sup>

The Anti-Fascist Organization also collected weapons, not to be used in the ghetto, but to be taken to the forest once a connection with partisans was established. Sarah Ginaite, a young member of the Anti-Fascist Organization, worked as a cleaning woman in a railroad station in Kovno that was being used as a temporary hospital for wounded German soldiers; the wounded Germans were kept there for several days after being brought from the front before being sent on to a regular hospital. One day, while cleaning a room that had just been vacated, Ginaite came across a weapon, apparently left behind by the soldier who had recently occupied the room. She put the weapon in a sack, surrounded it with potatoes, and took it back with her to the ghetto after work. As Ginaite approached the ghetto gate, she realized that if her sack was checked, she would be killed. A Jewish policeman was on guard at the gate; other police were standing nearby. Ginaite whispered to the Jewish policeman, "I have something very *tref* [nonkosher] in my sack." The policeman shouted angrily at her, "Stop dawdling! Faster!" He chased her through the ghetto gate while continuing to shout at her. The Lithuanian police at the gate did not interfere. Once safely inside the ghetto Ginaite silently thanked the Jewish policeman for having saved her life and, in violation of underground protocol, went straight to Yelin's

room in the ghetto. When she showed Yelin the weapon, he hugged her and told her that this was the first weapon that had been brought into the ghetto. But he also reprimanded her for having risked her life, and told her of an apartment outside the ghetto where she should take any other weapons that she might find. Later, when Ginaite went to the forest, the weapon that she had brought into the ghetto was returned to her, and she took it with her.<sup>7</sup>

Ginaite was able to bring a weapon into the ghetto due to the web of connections that linked the Anti-Fascist Organization, the Zionist organizations, the *Eltstenrat*, and at least some members of the Jewish Police. Ginaite had been sent to work at the railroad station by the Anti-Fascist Organization; her underground task was to deliver messages from the underground to its contacts in Kovno. The Anti-Fascist Organization was able to make such a placement due to the cooperation of members of the *Eltstenrat* in charge of work assignments. The Jewish Police were officially under the aegis of the *Eltstenrat*, and these ties were strengthened by connections between *Eltstenrat* members and members of the police who belonged to Zionist organizations. One policeman was a member of the Anti-Fascist Organization. The head of the Jewish Police, Moishe Levin, was sympathetic to underground activity.<sup>8</sup> Ginaite did not invent her use of the word “*tref*”: this was the term used by underground members and supporters for dangerously illegal goods brought into the ghetto. Ginaite had the luck to encounter a Jewish policeman at the gate who was close enough to the underground to immediately grasp her meaning, and quick-witted enough to respond appropriately.

#### THE COMMUNIST UNDERGROUND'S FIRST CONTACT OUTSIDE THE GHETTO

The Anti-Fascist Organization continued its efforts to locate Communists and others in Kovno willing to lend assistance, and establish contacts with them. A few underground members made contact with friends from before the war who were willing to serve as liaisons for the Anti-Fascist Organization or to enter the ghetto regularly, bringing information and packages. Yelin and other members of the Anti-Fascist Organization lived in the city for some time and established connections with Lithuanians who were willing to help. Some of these were Communist sympathizers; others, such as the doctor E. Kutorgiene, who offered to do anything she could to help the ghetto underground, were motivated

by their horror at German behavior toward the Jews. The number of those who were not members of Communist underground groups but willing to help was, however, very small.<sup>9</sup>

The Anti-Fascist Organization's first substantial connection was initiated in March 1943, when Yasha Davidov, an underground member who was living in the city, became acquainted with a Lithuanian tailor, Vazkovis Tomasheitis, who put him in touch with a Lithuanian anti-fascist organization that had been formed in Kovno in January of that year. Davidov and Tomasheitis exchanged information about their organizations, these discussions were relayed back through their respective groups, and on May 1, 1943, Yelin went to the city to attend a meeting of the Lithuanian organization, held under cover of a May Day gathering. Yelin was introduced as a new comrade named Vladas. At a meeting of a small group of people who remained after the party, it was revealed that "Vladas" was actually Chaim, a Jewish comrade from the ghetto. Yelin described the aims and work of the Anti-Fascist Organization, and it was agreed that the two organizations would work together closely. For several months thereafter, once a week, Dmitri Gelpert, as representative of the Jewish organization, and Vlatsovas Matosheitis, as representative of the Lithuanian organization, met in the bushes along the Neris River, outside the ghetto. In order to reach the meeting place, Gelpert would crawl under the ghetto fence, and Matosheitis would row across the river. At these meetings, plans for sabotage were coordinated, Matosheitis gave Gelpert political leaflets and newspapers produced in Kovno or received from the Big Land, and Gelpert gave Matosheitis linoleum stamps produced in the ghetto from materials stolen from the Germans, for printing proclamations of the two underground organizations.<sup>10</sup>

The major effort of the two underground organizations was the creation of a joint partisan unit, to be located outside Kovno. A place was designated for use as a base, weapons were collected there, and some members of the Lithuanian group were sent there. The Anti-Fascist Organization collected items that the unit would need, such as warm clothes and medicines, and groups were prepared in the city and the ghetto to be sent to the base. But a group of German police discovered the base. The commander was killed, and the others at the base fled. The Germans, heightening their efforts to find opponents in the city, discovered the underground group. Some managed to hide, but others were arrested and tortured. The Germans brought the wife of the tailor, Tomasheitis, who had initiated the contact between the Lithuanian and Jewish groups, to the ghetto and ordered her to identify the Jews with

whom her husband had worked. Despite torture, she refused to identify anyone.<sup>11</sup> The Anti-Fascist Organization in the ghetto managed to hide all of its members who had been involved in this effort, and no one was arrested. But the underground organization in the city was destroyed, leaving the Anti-Fascist Organization without any organizational links outside the ghetto.

#### A UNITED GHETTO UNDERGROUND

During the summer of 1943 representatives of the Anti-Fascist Organization and of the Zionist network Matzok began to discuss the formation of a united ghetto underground organization, and sometime in the fall an agreement was reached, and a united leadership structure was created. The interest in unity was impelled by the tightening of German control over the ghetto, in the wake of the German surrender at Stalingrad on February 2, 1943, and growing signs of Allied strength. Signs that the German army was heading toward defeat were welcomed with joy in the ghetto, but it was clear that as the prospects of the Germans became dimmer, they would intensify their repression in the ghetto. Stalingrad had been followed by a massacre of 44 Kovno ghetto Jews on the pretext that they were engaged in smuggling. It was clear to both the Anti-Fascist Organization and the Zionist organizations that any strategy of ghetto resistance would require cooperation between the two camps, and with the Eltstenrat and the Jewish Police.

The major topics of negotiation between the two sides were whether to send Jews to the forest, promote an uprising in the ghetto, or both, and if Jews were sent to the forest, what degree of autonomy they could retain within the partisan movement, as Jews and also as members of particular Jewish organizations. Many in the Zionist camp recognized that an uprising in the ghetto would lead only to massive slaughter. But some resisted the idea of sending Jews to the forest to join a Soviet-aligned partisan force and took a stance in favor of a ghetto uprising in part seriously but also in part to have something with which to counter the plan of going to the forest. One participant in these discussions, Nehemiah Endlin, remembered that while there were some within underground circles who advocated building malinas and preparing for armed struggle, there was much wider support for sending groups to the forest. Though Chaim Yelin supported the latter view, he nevertheless understood the importance of bringing the two groups together, Endlin wrote.<sup>12</sup>

A plan incorporating the perspectives of both sides was arrived at, according to which some groups of fighters would be sent to the ghetto, while others would remain in the ghetto to assist in a mass exodus when the Germans entered the ghetto to destroy it. This would entail setting parts of the ghetto on fire, breaching the ghetto fence so that people could go through it, and fighting the Germans if necessary. On the issue of Jewish autonomy, some of the Zionist groups insisted that Jewish groups should have the right to remain separate within the partisan movement and to speak Hebrew and practice movement customs such as singing Hebrew songs among themselves. The representatives of the Anti-Fascist Organization pointed out that it was not up to them to negotiate this issue; whatever they might agree to, the partisan leadership was likely to incorporate Jews into mixed partisan units, out of opposition to nationalism and/or military considerations. It was agreed that partisan bases would be created outside Kovno, at which groups from the ghetto could remain if they chose. In fact, no efforts were made to create fighting forces that would remain in the ghetto, no ghetto uprising took place, and no bases were created in the Kovno vicinity. The Anti-Fascist Organization focused on sending groups to the forest, many young Zionists were included in these groups, and the Zionist leadership focused on constructing malinas.

#### CONTACT WITH ALBINA

Interest in a united underground was impelled not only by anticipation of increased German repression of the ghetto, but also by the fact that in the fall of 1943 the Anti-Fascist Organization, after years of effort, finally established a connection with the partisan movement. During the summer the Anti-Fascist Organization sent several groups out of the ghetto to the forest, to look for partisan units. None of these efforts were successful. In September several Jews from the ghetto who worked in the city told the underground that while in the city they had met a Lithuanian who asked to be put in touch with "the writer, Chaim Yelin." At first the underground decided not to respond. Then a member of the organization, who was in the city doing underground work, happened to meet this man and recognized him as someone whom he had met in prison: they had both been arrested as Communists. With this information, the leadership of the Anti-Fascist Organization decided to take a risk and respond to the man's request. Dmitri Gelpert was sent to meet with the man; Chaim Yelin and another member of the Anti-Fascist Organization

hid nearby with weapons in case this should turn out to be an ambush. The man said that his name was Joazas Tubialis, and that he was from the Communist underground in Vilna and had been ordered to make contact with the Communist underground in Kovno. After several unsuccessful trips to Kovno, the group in Vilna had decided that he should try to make contact with Chaim Yelin, in the ghetto, because Yelin knew everyone in the Communist movement. It seemed to Gelpern that Tubialis was telling the truth. At the end of the meeting, Tubialis hugged Gelpern, said that he felt that they were on the right path, and that he would return the next day with evidence that he represented the Vilna Communists.

The next day Tubialis returned with a handwritten letter in Yiddish addressed to Yankl Levi, the member of the Anti-Fascist Organization who had met Tubialis in prison. The letter requested that a representative of the Anti-Fascist Organization come to Vilna and meet with the leaders of the Communist underground there. The signature was the Yiddish letter gimmel (G). This signature and various hints contained in the letter indicated that the author was Gesia Glezer. Glezer, whose underground name was Albina, was well known to members of the underground. She was a Lithuanian Jewish woman who had been a leading Communist before the war, and who in 1943 had parachuted into the Rudnitzer forest (as it was known in Yiddish; the Lithuanian name is Rudnikai), on the eastern edge of Lithuania, near the Byelorussian border. She served as a commander of a Lithuanian base where several partisan units were being formed. She was also engaged in promoting underground resistance in Lithuania; she was blonde, blue-eyed, and spoke Lithuanian with no trace of a Yiddish accent, and thus could pass as a Lithuanian when she chose to. On the strength of their belief that the letter was from Albina, the Anti-Fascist Organization sent Chaim Yelin to Vilna, where he met with the leaders of the Communist underground and Albina.<sup>13</sup>

Over the next months Albina devoted her efforts to creating a solid connection between the Kovno ghetto underground and the partisan movement. She took Yelin with her to the base in the Rudnitzer forest, where he met with the partisan commander, Yurgis (Henokh Ziman, a Jewish Communist from Kovno), who trained Yelin in partisan warfare. Then Albina returned to Kovno with Yelin. She asked to visit the ghetto in order to meet with the leadership of the Anti-Fascist Organization. Such a visit called for special preparations, because Albina carried a revolver that she was not willing to leave behind; if she were to be



searched at the gate, and her weapon were to be found, this would have endangered not only Albina and the underground, but the entire ghetto. By the fall of 1943 it had become relatively easy for underground members to go in and out of the gate, due to connections that the two wings of the underground, and underground supporters in the Judenrat, had developed with the Jewish Police, and also due to a constant flow of bribes and favors, the German and Lithuanian police at the gate were willing to look the other way when instructed to do so. The only real danger was of a surprise visit to the gate by higher German authorities. No such visit took place, however, and Albina's entry into the ghetto went smoothly.

During the ten days that Albina spent in the ghetto, in addition to meeting with the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Organization, she met with Moishe Levin, the head of the Jewish Police, and recruited him into the Anti-Fascist Organization. She also met with representatives of Hashomer Hatzair, which was already playing a key role in promoting unity between the Communist and Zionist underground organizations in the ghetto. Albina's visit to the ghetto strengthened the ties within the ghetto underground as a whole and enhanced the standing of the Anti-Fascist Organization within it. Her visit affirmed Communist support for the Anti-Fascist Organization's strategy of sending Jews to the forest and gave the organization's members confidence that a way could be found of accomplishing it.<sup>14</sup>

More than a year earlier, during June 1942, Irina Adamovich, a young Polish woman who served as messenger for the Warsaw ghetto underground, had entered the Kovno ghetto and had met with leaders of Matzok, the federation of Zionist groups, with Elkes, head of the Eltstenrat, and with leaders of the left-wing Zionist youth groups. She described the massacres that the Germans had conducted in the Vilna ghetto and elsewhere in the east. She informed the Kovno Zionist leaders of the plans for ghetto uprisings on the part of underground movements in the Warsaw and Vilna ghettos, and she urged the Kovno ghetto leaders to adopt the same strategy. Irina's visit had inspired members of Hashomer Hatzair and other left-wing Zionist youth organizations to press for a shift away from the educational and cultural activity that the Zionist groups emphasized at this time to a focus on mobilizing ghetto revolt. But other Zionists pointed out that a ghetto revolt would be sure to be defeated, and focused their efforts instead on building *malinas*.<sup>15</sup> Irina's visit prompted the Zionist groups to address the question of how to engage in active opposition, but it was Albina's visit to the ghetto that

crystallized the dominant response to this question by making flight to the forest appear, for the first time, as a real possibility.

#### SENDING JEWS TO THE FOREST

In meetings with Albina, the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Organization decided to begin sending groups to the forest and to encourage the Zionist organizations to participate in this project as well; by this time the two wings of the ghetto resistance were linked organizationally through two committees whose function was to provide leadership to the underground as a whole.<sup>16</sup> Albina advised the leaders of the Anti-Fascist Organization to establish a connection with a partisan unit led by a man named Solomin in the Yanova forest, 15 or 20 kilometers north of Kovno, in order to send some groups to it, and to prepare to send larger numbers of people to the Augustova forest, about 130 kilometers south of Kovno, which spanned the borders of Lithuania, Prussia, and eastern Poland. Mira Lan, a member of the central committee of the Anti-Fascist Organization, was sent to Solomin's partisan unit in the Yanova forest. She did not return to the ghetto. Underground members later learned that Solomin was unwilling to accept groups from the ghetto but had invited Lan to remain in his partisan unit, and that she had accepted his invitation.<sup>17</sup> The Anti-Fascist Organization now proposed to the joint underground command that groups be sent south, to the Augustova forest.

The proposal to send groups to the Augustova forest prompted a debate. Hashomer Hatzair, the Zionist group closest to the Communists, supported the Augustova plan. Other groups resisted this plan and argued instead for creating a fighting force that would remain in the ghetto to combat the Germans when they came to destroy it. It is not clear to what extent this was considered a realistic alternative, or to what extent this plan was put forward as a means of opposing the plan to join Red Army-aligned partisan units in the forest. Moishe Levin, the head of the Jewish Police, who participated in this debate, later remembered one of the plan's opponents saying, "Better to die than to fight under the red flag."<sup>18</sup> Many Zionists argued that sending young people to the forest meant abandoning the great majority, who would have to remain in the ghetto. Some argued for establishing a fighting force in the ghetto that would engage in combat with the Germans when they came to destroy the ghetto, and help the ghetto population escape. Others argued that the slogan of the young Zionists, "Dying with Honor," was meaningless, and that while they did not object to establishing a fighting force in the

ghetto, the main efforts of the underground should go toward creating malinas. Some raised practical objections to the Augustova plan: the Augustova forest was too far from the ghetto, the journey was too dangerous, and the ghetto did not have the weapons or military training necessary to create its own partisan unit. Members of the Anti-Fascist Organization replied that they had been assured that the Red Army had sent paratroopers to the Augustova forest to assist the groups from the ghetto in establishing partisan units. In the end a compromise was reached: groups would be sent to the Augustova forest, and a fighting force would also be created in the ghetto, to attack the Germans and help Jews escape when the end of the ghetto arrived. These units were never created.

The underground sent groups containing about 150 young people out of the ghetto toward the south, but most of these groups were captured along the way. The few that managed to reach the Augustova forest found themselves alone: there were no paratroopers to be found. They were forced to return to the ghetto. No partisan unit was created. The Augustova campaign was a major setback for the ghetto underground as a whole. It also heightened Zionist suspicions of information coming from Communist sources outside the ghetto. But there was little enthusiasm among the Zionists for attempting to mobilize a revolt in the ghetto, and despite the Augustova disaster, young people in the underground, including many in the Zionist groups, had now come to focus their hopes on the possibility of going to the forest.<sup>19</sup>

Albina was now living in Kovno at the home of the ghetto underground's Lithuanian supporter, Dr. E. Kutorgiene, and working on the formation of a new Communist underground in the city. She remained in touch with the ghetto underground, and in the wake of the failed Augustova plan she put the ghetto underground leaders in touch with the commander of the Lithuanian partisan base in the Rudnitzer forest, Yurgis (the Jewish Communist from Kovno, Henokh Ziman). Yurgis, who earlier had apparently urged Yelin to establish a partisan unit in the Augustova forest, and who may have been the source of the incorrect assurances that they would find paratroopers there, now agreed to take groups sent by the Kovno ghetto underground into a newly created unit on his base called "Death to the Occupier." The Augustova experience had convinced the ghetto underground that they needed experienced guides. Partisan guides were sent from the Rudnitzer forest, and on November 23, 1943, the first group left the ghetto for that destination. Only a small number of those who left reached the Rudnitzer forest. The

group encountered German soldiers at a number of points along the way, several members of the group were killed, and one, who was wounded, returned to the ghetto.

Due to the losses suffered by the first group that went to the Rudnitzer forest, the underground decided to send succeeding groups by truck. With the help of underground contacts outside the ghetto, a driver was found who was willing to take truckloads of Jews to the forest. On December 14 the truck left the ghetto with 30–35 young people in back, ostensibly a work brigade on its way to the forest; two members of the underground, dressed in German uniforms, sat in front. With the help of the ghetto administration and the Jewish Police, the truck passed safely through the ghetto gate. Eight kilometers outside the ghetto, the truck driver stopped and picked up three partisan guides who were waiting by the side of the road. The truck continued to a point 110 kilometers from Kovno, where the road stopped. The group walked the last 40 kilometers through the Rudnitzer forest to the base of Death to the Occupier.<sup>20</sup> Sarah Ginaite, the young woman who had brought the first weapon into the ghetto, arrived in the forest with this group.<sup>21</sup>

This successful trip to the forest formed the model for many successive trips. Young people in the various organizations within the underground, and in the periphery of the underground, clamored to be included in these groups. Yelin accompanied these groups to the ghetto and returned to the ghetto with the driver; he spent considerable time outside the ghetto, arranging for the trucks that were lent to the underground for this purpose. Underground members employed in workshops in the ghetto made clothes and other things for the young people to take with them, and smuggled these items out under their clothes. Underground members in the ghetto provided what military training they could for those preparing to leave. Underground comrades in the city prepared the trucks and provided drivers. People from the ghetto administration would station themselves at the ghetto gate when a truck with “tref” contents was scheduled to leave the ghetto. The underground scheduled the trucks’ departures for moments when many work groups were entering or leaving the ghetto, and when Lithuanian and German guards were to be on duty who were particularly easily distracted in the chaos. Jewish policemen carried the weapons being taken to the forest through the gate as packages of implements for work in the forest and put them back in the truck once it had passed through. The Jewish Police recognized the words “shears and iron, the common people” as the password of the underground. These words were from a piece by Sholem Aleichem

celebrating the struggles of Yiddish-speaking tailors, and of poor Jews as a whole. Jewish police stationed at the gate to check the vehicles passing through knew that any truck driver who whispered this phrase was conveying young men and women to the forest.<sup>22</sup>

Over a few months, eight groups were sent to the Rudnitzer forest. All of them arrived safely. Inside the ghetto, family members and friends of those leaving often knew when a truck was to depart, and some began going to the gate at that time to stand by the road as the truck passed by, silently sending their wishes for success. The groups that gathered at the gate at these times became so large as to pose a threat to security. The underground stopped these silent demonstrations of support by insisting that those leaving not tell anyone when the truck was to leave. After a group left, underground members in the ghetto administration took the names of those who had left off all ghetto lists so that their absence would not be discovered, and their families punished for their absence. Between November 1943 and March 1944 the Jewish General Fighting Organization sent hundreds of young men and women (mostly the former) to the Rudnitzer forest.<sup>23</sup>

#### THE DECLINE OF THE UNDERGROUND AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GHETTO

Meanwhile German control over the ghetto tightened. On November 1, 1943, the ghetto was officially designated a concentration camp. Previously ruled by the SA, it was now placed under the jurisdiction of the SS. SS Captain Wilhelm Goecke was placed in charge of the ghetto. Under his rule deportations from the ghetto and massacres commenced. Meanwhile, the Germans were conducting large-scale massacres in smaller ghettos in the area, some of them involving the destruction of virtually entire ghetto populations, in some cases focused on those who could not work, including children, the elderly, and the sick and disabled. As news of these massacres reached the Kovno ghetto, many parents did whatever they could to get their children out of the ghetto. Many children were placed with Lithuanian families outside the ghetto.

Goecke believed that every ghetto contained an underground movement, and his efforts to locate such a movement in Kovno led him to the Jewish Police. On March 26, 1944, he ordered the 130 members of the Jewish Police to assemble for instructions, ostensibly concerning preparations for air raids. The next morning, after the work brigades had left the ghetto, and as the policemen stood in rows awaiting their

instructions, the Germans encircled the ghetto. The policemen were ordered into cars and taken to the Ninth Fort, where they were interrogated about the activities of the underground, especially the transport of young people to the forest and the building of bunkers in the ghetto. Few gave any information. Thirty-six of the policemen were shot, beginning with Moishe Levin, the head of the Jewish Police, and his two assistants. Meanwhile, what came to be called the “Children’s Action” was taking place in the ghetto: some 1,300 Jews, mostly children and people over fifty-five, were taken out of the ghetto and murdered.<sup>24</sup>

The Jewish Police and the *Eltstenrat* were abolished. Those who replaced the Jewish Police were willing to carry out German orders. Elkhanan Elkes retained the title of “head Jew,” but his position carried only nominal authority. The previous quasi autonomy of the ghetto authorities was replaced by what amounted to direct German rule. Though the guard around the ghetto was reinforced, the underground continued its efforts to send young people to the forest. On April 6, 1944, while Yelin was in the city making arrangements for the next trip to the forest, he was arrested and interrogated. In order to deflect attention from the ghetto, and the underground, he claimed to be a Russian paratrooper. He died without giving the Germans any information.<sup>25</sup> In his absence, and with the ever-tightening German control of the ghetto, the ghetto underground fell apart. On July 8, 1944, with the Red Army approaching, the Germans entered the ghetto to deport the population of the ghetto to concentration camps in Germany, and set the ghetto on fire; most of those who avoided deportation by hiding in *malinas* died. When the Red Army arrived on August 1 to liberate Kovno, only a few survivors remained in the ghetto.



# Conclusion

The Warsaw ghetto uprising and the strategy of internal ghetto rebellion that it followed have come to be regarded as the gold standard of Holocaust resistance. Though Hersch Smolar published a short account of resistance in the Minsk ghetto immediately after the war, and a more detailed account years later, the story of the Minsk ghetto has not become part of the popular memory of Holocaust resistance, nor has the fact that in some ghettos resistance took the form not of internal revolt but of flight to the forest and participation in the partisan movement. Ghetto underground movements that followed the strategy of internal revolt have received extensive scholarly attention; those that did not have been for the most part ignored. During the war the pros and cons of these two approaches were debated within many ghetto underground movements, and in the Vilna and Bialystok ghettos, where the majority supported the strategy of ghetto revolt, small groups within the underground nevertheless followed the strategy of flight to the forest. But this debate occupies a small place in the postwar literature on ghetto resistance. Experts in the field are of course aware that there was an alternative to the strategy of internal ghetto revolt, and that debates over strategy took place in many ghettos. But the focus on internal ghetto revolt has so overwhelmed the alternative to it that the memory of the Holocaust has come to mean internal ghetto revolts. To the extent that any other form of ghetto resistance enters the narrative it is likely to be treated as requiring explanation: perhaps circumstances made ghetto revolt impossible,



or perhaps a weak sense of Jewish identity or the influence of Communist ideology over some underground members deterred them from following the high road of armed revolt within the ghetto.

The main reason for the disproportionate attention given to this form of resistance is that in the years after the war those who participated in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and in other attempted uprisings, were in a better position to tell their stories than those who went to the forest and joined the partisans. Postwar accounts of Holocaust resistance have been written under the shadow of the conflict between Communism and Zionism, and the greatest part of the literature has been written from the Zionist side of this divide. The memory of Holocaust resistance has been shaped by assumptions and agendas that have more to do with this debate than with what actually took place in the ghettos of eastern Europe during the war. The chain of associations between Zionism, ghetto uprisings, and Jewish resistance has been so tightly constructed that it is easy to forget that during the war many Zionists as well as other Jews opposed ghetto uprisings, some of them for reasons that are worth taking seriously. Some of the older Jewish leaders, including Zionists, regarded those advocating ghetto revolts as young hotheads who were more interested in dying in a blaze of glory than in helping Jews in the ghettos survive the war. Many of those who took this view had no alternative but collaboration. But their point that there was no place in the ghetto revolt strategy for survival is worth noting. It is also easy to forget that for most ghetto Jews the choice between ghetto revolt and going to the forest had more to do with urgent practical concerns than ideology. Ghetto Jews wanted to take revenge on the Nazis, and if possible contribute to their defeat, but they also hoped to survive the war. Where there was a choice between ghetto revolt and going to the forest, the vast majority preferred the latter.

This book is an attempt to restore to memory the model of Holocaust resistance exemplified and carried out most extensively by the Minsk ghetto underground. The forest/partisan model of resistance was predicated on the view that Jews and non-Jews had a common interest in fighting the Nazis, and it involved fostering such alliances. This form of resistance was not possible everywhere, but the fact that it was possible on such a large scale in Minsk casts a somewhat different light on the Holocaust than does an account according to which Jews were isolated everywhere and were nowhere able to find significant allies. An effort to bring the Minsk ghetto model of resistance back into memory raises two questions. First, why has the history of Holocaust resistance been so

skewed toward the Warsaw ghetto model? Second, what difference does it make to include the alternative represented by the Minsk ghetto? A meditation on the significance of the Minsk ghetto model for our understanding of the Holocaust generally requires attention to the form of resistance that took place in the Warsaw ghetto, and especially to the postwar developments that led to its becoming the template for Holocaust resistance as a whole.

The Warsaw ghetto uprising occupies a large place in the memory of Holocaust resistance because the story is extraordinarily dramatic and inspiring. It would have been surprising if this story had not been told and retold, and if the attention of historians had not been drawn to it, in the years after the war. It would also be surprising if there had not been interest in underground movements in other ghettos that attempted the same strategy. The mass resistance in the Warsaw ghetto was based on the amazing phenomenon of an entire population deciding to fight to the death. How this came about, how the young Zionists and others who led it managed to imbue a larger population with their determination to resist, and how the young people who led the movement had developed the commitment and bonds of solidarity that enabled them to play this role are all questions eminently worth studying. The question of why the strategy of armed ghetto revolt worked in the Warsaw ghetto but not in other ghettos where underground movements attempted it has great historical and analytical interest as well. The problem is not that this form of resistance has been so extensively examined, but that a memory of the Holocaust has been constructed in which other forms of resistance barely exist, and in which those, Zionists and others, who questioned the wisdom of mobilizing revolts inside the ghetto are cast either as cowards or as lacking in commitment to the Jewish people, regardless of the concrete circumstances of particular ghettos.

Dramatic as the story of the Warsaw ghetto is, the story of the Minsk ghetto also has its appeal. Cutting off contact between Jews and non-Jews was a central goal of the German occupiers, backed up by threats of death to those who disregarded it. The Minsk underground, and many individual Byelorussians and Jews, refused to allow German threats to prevent them from contact with one another. Jews and non-Jews worked together against German rule, and many non-Jews risked their lives helping Jews escape the ghetto and reach the partisans. Byelorussians, especially those old enough to have been imbued with the Soviet rhetoric of internationalism, often take the history of wartime Jewish/Byelorussian solidarity for granted. But one would think that for westerners who half

a century after the event remain shocked by the wartime abandonment of the Jews the story of an underground movement built on solidarity between Jews and non-Jews would have a special poignancy and would also have come to occupy a central place in the memory of Holocaust resistance. The fact that this has not been the case requires explanation.

The lopsided memory of Holocaust resistance is the result of postwar developments. In the years following the war survivors of the Warsaw and other Polish and Lithuanian ghettos were in a much better position to tell their stories than were survivors of the Minsk ghetto and other ghettos in the occupied Soviet territories who had gone to the forest. Furthermore, postwar audiences in the West and in Israel were much more receptive to stories of Jewish uprisings or attempted uprisings inside ghettos than to stories of Jews who fled to the forest and fought with the Soviet-aligned partisan movement. The vast majority of survivors of Polish and Lithuanian ghettos immigrated either to Palestine/Israel or to the West, in most cases to the United States. In both Israel and the United States survivors who had taken part in ghetto uprisings or attempted uprisings published accounts of their experiences. Zionist organizations whose members had led such uprisings saw to it that the memory of this resistance should not be forgotten. The next generation of Jewish young people, especially in Israel, but also to a considerable extent in the United States, learned about the Warsaw ghetto uprising as part of their education about the Holocaust. The story of the Warsaw ghetto uprising took hold among non-Jews as well and came to be widely regarded as a model of resistance to brutal repression. But as some in the ghettos had been aware at the time, this model of resistance has its questionable aspects. Decades later, in an increasingly conflict-wrought world, overcoming oppression tends to call for building alliances, formulating joint strategies, finding ways to negotiate with opponents. Dying for the honor of one's people may not be the most useful model of resistance.

While the Warsaw ghetto model was taking hold in not only the Jewish but also the broader popular imagination, accounts of the form of resistance exemplified by the Minsk ghetto were encountering obstacles. First, the great majority of Soviet Jews who survived the German occupation remained in the Soviet Union after the war. For some time after the war it was inadvisable if not dangerous for Soviet Jews to speak or write publicly of their wartime ghetto experiences. Immediately after the war the Soviet leadership embarked upon an effort to construct a shared Soviet identity around an account of the war as a nationally shared trauma, which the various Soviet nationalities had suffered equally and

resisted jointly. There was of course some truth in this: everyone under German occupation had suffered, and very large numbers had died, non-Jews as well as Jews. The Minsk story was one instance of a larger pattern of joint resistance that included people of various nationalities. But it was also the case that Jews were targeted for extermination by the Nazis and driven into ghettos for that purpose, and that this set their experience apart from the experience of other Soviet nationalities. In the years after the war any Soviet Jew who was known to have been in the ghetto during the war was likely to face discrimination in seeking jobs and housing and in other areas. The Soviet view that anyone who had come under German rule might have been a collaborator made ghetto survivors, along with many others, suspects. Furthermore, the ghetto did not fit the Soviet myth of the war. Jews who brought attention to their wartime ghetto experience in the years after the war did so at some risk. These problems were greatly intensified after the onset of the anticommunist campaign, when Soviet Jews in general became targets of Soviet repression, regardless of whether they had been in occupied territory during the war. During the years of this campaign Jews who brought attention to their Jewish identity in any way risked retribution. This was hardly an atmosphere in which accounts of specifically Jewish wartime experiences were likely to see the light of day.

Some Soviet Jews, including Jews from the Minsk ghetto, immigrated either to Palestine/Israel or to the West, mostly the United States, and some wrote accounts of their wartime experiences, including their experiences in the ghetto. But in the United States the Cold War took hold soon after the war, and by the late 1940s the internal anti-Communist campaign that later came to be called McCarthyism had begun. The recasting of the Soviet Union, recently a wartime ally, as the enemy of the United States, tilted the popular memory of the war toward the West. A generation of young Americans grew up with the impression that World War II had been mostly a battle between the Nazis and Western democracy, exemplified and led by the United States, with the Soviet Union playing some vaguely defined marginal role. The Holocaust, according to this view, took place in Germany and Eastern Europe, meaning mostly Poland and Lithuania, but because the Soviet peoples languished under another sort of evil rule, whatever happened there during the war was too confusing to think about. In the context of a worldview that defined Nazism and Communism as two sides of the same totalitarian evil, there was little room for stories of Jews whose resistance to fascism consisted of fighting with Soviet-aligned partisan forces. Within the

mainstream Jewish arena in the United States there was even more resistance to such stories. In the postwar years Jews had entered public life in the United States on the basis of an implicit promise of loyalty to the United States, which was understood to mean absolute support for American Cold War policies. The last thing that leaders of the Jewish mainstream wanted to be reminded of was the close if conflicted relationship between Jews and Communism in Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union and the occupied Soviet territories, before and during the war.

In Israel the obstacles to discussion of the Minsk, or forest, model of Holocaust resistance were somewhat different than in the United States but had more or less the same effect. The Warsaw model of resistance was explicitly Jewish, whereas the forest model involved Jews joining partisan units of mixed nationality and supporting a partisan movement in which little credit was given to Jewish participation. A moderate, Social Democratic left occupied the center of Israeli politics until at least the late 1960s. Communism was not demonized in Israel in the way that it was in the United States, though it had very little support from Israeli Jews. But Israeli national identity was based on a conception of Jewish collective interests, and the need to provide a haven from a world that had closed its doors when Jewish survival was threatened. The Warsaw model of a heroic Jewish battle against overwhelming odds and the background of surrounding indifference fit this worldview. The Minsk model of Jews forging alliances with non-Jews and fighting fascism alongside them did not. The postwar romanticization of unaided Jewish struggle was not entirely fair to the young Zionists who had led those revolts; left Zionists especially had been entirely aware of the importance of alliances with non-Jewish forces and had done their utmost to create them. But in Poland and Lithuania there were, tragically, few allies to be found.

Postwar Israeli views of the Holocaust were shaped by hopes of attracting more Jews to Israel, and also by the Zionist rhetoric that for decades had set Palestine and the Diaspora against each other, rather than accepting the fact that for many centuries some Jews had lived in Palestine, and others had lived elsewhere, and that this was likely to continue to be the case, even if the respective proportions might vary. The rhetoric of the Zionist movement in prewar eastern Europe was polemical and dogmatic, but probably no more so than the rhetoric of the other movements with which it was in competition. For the ideologues of the Bund leaving the Diaspora was unthinkable, and any path other than the joint struggle of Jewish and non-Jewish working classes was unacceptable. During the interwar years Polish Bundists were fervently opposed to

both Zionism and Communism, the former because it meant abandoning the Diaspora, the latter because they regarded the Soviet Union as having betrayed the revolution. For Jewish Communists the only solution was a Bolshevik-style revolution and support of the Soviet Union. Zionism in their eyes was merely the Jewish form of bourgeois nationalism. According to Zionist rhetoric, the Diaspora represented nothing more than a long saga of oppression to be left behind as quickly as possible, and all Jewish history pointed to a return to Palestine in which all Jews should participate. Zionist rhetoric was no more ideological than the rhetoric of the Bund or of the Communists, and in the years before the war it had the advantage of pointing to a viable solution for Jews trapped in an increasingly anti-Semitic environment: leaving for Palestine. But after the war memory of the Holocaust, and of Holocaust resistance, became intertwined not just with the obvious point that it would have been better if more Jews had left when it was still possible, but also with the more extreme and less defensible view that life in the Diaspora led inevitably to the Holocaust, and that Israel represented the only viable future for Jews.

The Holocaust was not inevitable. The Nazis came to power with the assistance of a German elite that might have acted otherwise, and Nazi Germany was allowed to expand by surrounding nations that might also have acted otherwise. The view that the Diaspora involved nothing but oppression for Jews could not account for the richness of Jewish cultures throughout the Diaspora, or for the many times and places in which Jews had lived in relative harmony with their non-Jewish neighbors. It is true, however, that anti-Semitism has been remarkably persistent over a very long historical period. It has changed its form as surrounding societies have changed, but has remained capable of inspiring great violence as well as discrimination. In this sense the Holocaust was, as the Zionists suggested, the tip of the iceberg. During the long history of the Diaspora there have been many moments when life in particular places became untenable for Jews. The solution was to leave and settle elsewhere. What was different about the Holocaust was that it was impossible to leave. The vast majority of eastern European Jews had no options other than Palestine, and even Palestine was not entirely open to Jewish immigration. This made the case for the establishment of a Jewish state compelling, but it did not suggest that all Jews needed to go there, or that they would choose to do so.

The Warsaw ghetto model of resistance has become tied to a version of Jewish history according to which anti-Semitism is pervasive in the

Diaspora and the only solution is for all Jews to go to Israel. Before and after the war this was the rhetoric of major currents of Zionism, but it was never the reality of Jews or for that matter of Zionism itself, which became a mass movement in Poland before the war and in the United States after the war by appealing to Jews who supported the right of others to go to Palestine/Israel but who had no intention of going there themselves. The argument that all Jews should go to Israel is based on two assumptions: first, that Jewish life in the Diaspora is impossible because all non-Jews either hate Jews or are indifferent to attacks on Jews, and second, that Jews will be safe from such hatred if they all gather in a Jewish state. Both assumptions are wrong. First, anti-Semitism has been the result of complex social dynamics that affect different groups differently and are filtered through ideology, culture, and politics in ways that are not fixed and that may lead to alliances as well as tensions. There is often substantial overlap between the concerns of groups of Jews and non-Jews. Second, if it were true that Jews faced nothing but hatred and indifference from non-Jews, the existence of a Jewish state would not help much. Jews make up a very small percentage of the world's population. This calls for finding paths to coexistence, whether from within a Jewish state or outside it.

This is not meant to question the importance of the Warsaw ghetto uprising itself. By the spring of 1943, when the Germans were planning to annihilate the remainder of the Warsaw ghetto population, the only form of resistance that was possible was armed revolt inside the ghetto, and an entire population took that path, even though it led to death. The importance of the Minsk ghetto story is that it reminds us that other forms of resistance may be possible, and that alliances may be formed even under dire conditions. The Minsk ghetto model also places Jewish Holocaust resistance in the broader historical context of resistance to fascism as a whole. It reminds us that Jewish struggles against Nazi rule were part of a larger anti-fascist movement, and also that terrible circumstances can sometimes bring out the best in people and enable them to reach out across ethnic and other barriers for mutual support.

The Warsaw and Minsk ghetto models do not exhaust the forms of resistance undertaken by ghetto Jews during the war. Ghetto resistance included smuggling food into the ghetto and smuggling Jews out of the ghetto to hiding places, as well as mobilizing revolts and sending Jews to the forest to fight. Where ghetto underground movements were able to save the lives of ghetto Jews, even temporarily, this contributed enormously to their popular support. On January 18, 1943, German forces

entered the Warsaw ghetto to seize Jews, for the first time since the Great Deportation. The underground engaged German soldiers in a battle in the course of which they were able to liberate some Jews from the Germans' grasp. This greatly strengthened the bond between the underground and the ghetto population. The Minsk underground and Judenrat did their best to warn the Minsk ghetto population when they knew of impending pogroms. When the Judenrat learned of a German plan to place skilled and unskilled workers in different parts of the ghetto, as a prelude to a massacre of the unskilled, the underground produced and distributed massive quantities of false documents, showing the ghetto population to consist almost entirely of skilled workers, which dissuaded the Germans from carrying out their plan. Actions such as these had a great deal to do with popular support for the ghetto underground and the Judenrat members associated with it.

Every political current within ghetto resistance movements regarded armed struggle, and efforts to promote armed struggle, whether in the ghetto or the forest, as more important than saving lives. The Byelorussian and Jewish women who participated in the Minsk underground campaign to rescue children from the ghetto risked their lives every time they crossed the ghetto border to do so, and the underground supported their efforts despite the risk entailed. But the few who took part in this effort and survived to write memoirs after the war give only sparse accounts of it, while treating other activities in greater depth. The impression one gets from reading these memoirs is that their authors regarded saving lives as important on a moral or human level but believed that on a political level it was their contributions to armed struggle that counted. At the beginning of the war this attitude was understandable, at least in Minsk, where it was widely believed that the Red Army could defeat the Germans quickly, especially if it had assistance from those who remained in occupied territory. As the war wore on, and it became clear that the outcome of the war was mostly being decided by battles elsewhere, saving the lives of Jews trapped in the ghettos might have become a higher priority if it had not been for the view, shared by Zionists, Communists, and others, that armed struggle was the highest form of resistance, regardless of the circumstances.

Gunnar Paulsson suggests that the Warsaw ghetto underground might have done better to have put more effort into smuggling Jews out of the ghetto and finding places for them to hide, even if this had involved putting less effort into mobilizing a revolt inside the ghetto (*Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* [New Haven: Yale University Press,



2002] 57–61). He calculates that approximately 70,000 Jews survived the war hiding in Aryan Warsaw, and argues that there was room for thousands more. Underground efforts toward this end, he points out, could have saved many lives. But at the time neither the Warsaw ghetto underground nor virtually any other anti-fascist resistance movement would have been willing to place the saving of lives on the same level as armed struggle. From the vantage point of the turn of the twenty-first century, armed struggle seems less inspiring than it once may have. That for the Minsk ghetto saving lives was a major goal, if subordinate to taking up arms, is to its credit.

# Notes

## CHAPTER 1. JEWISH-BYELORUSSIAN SOLIDARITY IN WORLD WAR II MINSK

1. Jan T. Gross, *The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2. In *The Minsk Ghetto* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989) 158, Hersh Smolar estimates that by the end of the war close to 10,000 Jews from the ghetto had managed to “get to the forest,” that is, join partisan units. In an interview at Yad Vashem in 1972 Smolar described having arrived at this figure in discussions in the forest toward the end of the war with other leaders of the ghetto underground who were by that time, like Smolar, members of partisan units. Smolar estimated that 2,000 of the 10,000 arrived in groups sent by the underground. Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605. Ya’akov Grinstein, a former member of the ghetto underground, echoed this estimate in my interview with him (Givatayim, Israel, November 12, 2000). Grinstein estimated that half of those who reached partisan units had been sent by the underground, and that the rest arrived without the underground’s help. The size of the population of the ghetto is similarly uncertain. In *Resistance in Minsk* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1966) 9, Smolar, who at the time transliterated his name into English as “Smoliar,” gives the figure 80,000 as the highest level of the ghetto population; in *Minsk Ghetto*, 52, he gives the figure 100,000. Shlomo Shvartz, in *Di Yidn in Sovietn-Farband, Milkhome un Nokh-Milkhome Yorn, 1935-1965* (New York: Yidisher Arbeter-Komitet, 1967), cites Smolar’s figure of 80,000 but adds that Byelorussian Kuzma Kisiliev, Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, said in a conversation with the correspondent of the *Morgn Freiheit* just after the war that the Minsk ghetto first contained 75,000 Minsk Jews, but that the population grew to 100,000 when others were brought to the ghetto from surrounding towns and

cities and from central Europe. See Shvartz, 41, 65–66; Shvartz cites the *Morgen Freiheit*, May 23, 1945.

3. An English translation of the German order establishing the ghetto has been published (together with a facsimile of the German original and a Russian translation) in *Natsistkoye Zoloto iz Belarusi: Dokumenty i Materialy* (Nazi Gold from Belarus Documents and Materials) (Minsk: National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, 1998) 18–22.

4. Raissa Chernoglazova (editor of *Prisoners of War 1941–56: Documents and Materials* [Minsk: Izdatel Skakn BB, 2003]), interview, Minsk, September 15, 2003.

5. Kenneth Slepyan, “The Soviet Partisan Movement and the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 10, gives the figure of 70,000 Soviet partisans for June 1942. Slepyan writes that by January 1943 this number had risen to 120,000, and by June 1943 to at least 180,000.

6. The evolution of the ghetto underground, the creation of a Minsk-wide underground, and the subsequent history of ghetto resistance are described in Smolar’s two books and also in the following: Anna P. Kupreyeva, “The Minsk Ghetto Underground,” NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1197; Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, “Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto,” NARB fond 4683, opis 2, delo 77; Anna Semyonovna Machis, “The Minsk Ghetto” (a report written by a former member of the ghetto underground, in a partisan unit, December 1943), NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656; Anna Semyonovna Machis Levina, “Documents on the Underground Struggle in the Minsk Ghetto during the Great Patriotic War,” 1974, 1981, NARB fond 4386, opis 3, delo 1196; Anna P. Kupreyeva, “Study of the Activity of the Territorial Underground Group That Functioned in the Ghetto in the Area of Tatarskaya Street,” NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1198; and Ya’akov Grinstein, “Umkum un Vidershtand af Vaysrusisher Erd, 1941–45” (Annihilation and Resistance in the Territory of Byelorussia, 1941–45), Yad Vashem Archives, 033/459. The latter is the Yiddish manuscript of Grinstein’s book [in Hebrew] *Ud me’ Kikar ha’Yovel* (A Survivor of Jubilee Square) (Israel: Beit Loxamei Ha-Getaot, 1969).

7. The following account is based on interviews with Mira Ruderman in Minsk, October 8, 1999, July 20, 2000, and September 11, 2003.

8. Ya’akov Grinstein, interview, Givatayim, Israel, November 12, 2000.

9. Tanya Lifshitz Boyko, interview, Bat Yam, Israel, November 10, 2000.

10. Ganzenko’s rescue from the Shirokaya Street camp, his role as a “friend of the Jews” in the partisan movement, and his part in the formation of Zorin’s Brigade are described in Abrasha Slukhovsky’s memoir of his experiences in the Minsk ghetto and with the partisans: *Fun Geto in di Velder* (From the Ghetto to the Forests) (Paris: Farlag Oyfsnai, 1975) 134–37. Ya’akov Grinstein describes Ganzenko’s rescue from the Shirokaya Street camp and his role in the establishment of Zorin’s Brigade in “Umkum un Vidershtand,” 74–77. My statistics on Zorin’s Brigade are from NARB fond 3500, opis 5, delo 402 (untitled document).

11. The following account is based on interviews with Raissa Grigorevna Khasenyevich in Minsk, October 13, 1999, July 11, 2000, and September 16, 2003.

12. Joseph V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, which was first published in *Prosveshcheniye*, nos. 3–5 (March–May 1913).

13. The Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum lists forty-six books on the Warsaw ghetto in its bibliography on Jewish resistance, and a smaller number on the Vilna ghetto and on Jewish resistance in Poland and Lithuania as a whole, at <http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/lerman/index.php?content=bibliography>.

14. Smoliar, *Resistance in Minsk and Minsk Ghetto*; Dan Zhits, *Gito Minsk ve'Toldotav le'Or ha-Teud be-Xadash* (The History of the Minsk Ghetto in Light of the New Documentation), Basic Research Series no. 13 (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2000).

## CHAPTER 2. WHY MINSK WAS DIFFERENT

1. Hersh Smolar, interview, April 1972, transcript, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 61.

2. Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 57–61.

3. Daniel Romanovsky describes the results of much more extensive interviews conducted in a rural area of Byelorussia and Russia concerning relations between Jews and non-Jews during the war, in two articles: “The Holocaust in the Eyes of Homo Sovieticus: A Survey Based on Northeastern Belorussia and Northwestern Russia,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1999): 355–82; and “Soviet Jews under Nazi Occupation in Northeastern Belarus and Western Russia,” in *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Zvi Gitelman, 230–52 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Romanovsky, who interviewed both Jews and non-Jews, found that by 1941 there were few villagers in this area who still supported the Soviet Union, and even fewer who helped Jews out of a concept of Soviet patriotism. Jews among his interviewees said that some villagers helped Jews, others betrayed them, and most remained passive. A view of Jews as members of an alien group was deeply engrained among non-Jewish villagers, and some were more likely to help non-Jewish partisans than Jews. However, many Jews pointed out that those who betrayed Jews also betrayed non-Jewish partisans. Most Jews also attributed the failure of most non-Jews to help them to fear of the Germans, especially fear of execution. Clearly in this area Soviet internationalism enjoyed nothing like the influence it had at the time in Minsk, and a sense of cultural difference between Jews and non-Jews ran deep. But the behavior of these villagers was apparently not driven by hatred of Jews.

4. Raissa Grigorievna Khasenyevich, interview, Minsk, September 16, 2003.

5. Esfir Kissel and Frieda Aslyosova, interview, Minsk, September 9, 2003.

6. Mikhail Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003.

7. Mira Ruderman and Abram Rosovsky, interview, Minsk, September 11, 2003.

8. Mikhail Treister, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003.

9. Rosa Zelenko and Lyubov Zuckerman, interview, Minsk, September 14, 2003.

10. Raissa Grigorievna Khasenyevich, interview, Minsk, September 16, 2003.
11. Mikhail Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003.
12. Abram Rosovsky, interview, Minsk, September 11, 2003.
13. Mikhail Treister, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003.
14. Frida Volfovna Reyzman (Losik), interview, Minsk, September 16, 2003.
15. Abram Rosovsky, interview, Minsk, September 11, 2003.
16. Anatoli Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim: Me'Geto Minsk ad Maxanot Sibir* (Brown Boots, Red Boots: From the Minsk Ghetto to the Camps of Siberia) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1977).
17. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 24.
18. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 40.
19. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 39.
20. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 20.
21. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 29.
22. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 32.
23. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 37–39.
24. Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim*, 42–44.
25. Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971) 294.
26. Mikhail Treister, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003; and Rosa Zuckerman, interview, Minsk, September 14, 2003.
27. Mikhail Kantorovich and Mikhail Treister, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003.
28. Sarah Goland, Shoah Foundation Interview 24994, December 16, 1996, tape 1 (lent to me by Sarah Goland, Nazteret Ilit, Israel).
29. Martin Dean describes the overlap between Byelorussian nationalist organizations and the German administration of occupied Byelorussia in *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) 106.
30. Shalom Cholavsky, *Be'Sufat ha'Kilayon: Yaxadut Byelorussia ha'Mizraxit be'Milxemet ha'Olam ha'Sheniya* (In the Storm of Destruction: The Jews of Eastern Byelorussia during the Second World War) (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, 1988) 234–35.
31. Cholavsky, *Be'Sufat ha-Kilayon*, 232.
32. Anna Krasnopërko, *Briefe meiner Erinnerung: Mein Überleben im jüdischen Ghetto von Minsk 1941/42* (Letters of My Memory: My Survival in the Jewish Ghetto of Minsk 1941/42) (Villigst, Germany: Haus Villigst, 1991) 20.
33. Chasya Mendeleeвна Pruslina, interview, Committee on the Creation of the Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War, August 25, 1944, p. 12 (a handwritten manuscript included among Pruslina's papers).
34. Sarah Levina, memoir, dated 1968, fond 305, opis 1, delo 311, p. 5/90, Papers of Vladimir Borisovich Karpov, Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Minsk.
35. Bronya Goffman, memoir, NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, p. 84, and fond 4, opis 33a, korobka 87, delo 664; interview, Minsk, September 30, 1999.

36. Vasilii Ivanovich Saychik, in *Minsk Antifashistskae Padpolye* (Minsk: Belarus, 1995) 104.

37. Grigori Hosid, interview, Minsk, September 14, 1999.

38. Report of the Security Police and the SD about the Activities of Einsatzgruppen B, August 5 1941. Quoted, in Russian translation, in *Judenfrei! Svobodno ot Evreyev! (Free of Jews!) A History of the Minsk Ghetto in Documents*, ed. Raissa A. Chernoglazova (Minsk: Asobny Dakh, 1999) 162.

39. Appendix 1, Report on the Activity of Group GFP 26 K-723, on the attitude of the local population to extermination actions against Jews. Quoted, in Russian translation, in *Judenfrei! Svobodno ot Evreyev!* 167.

40. From the report by Major Doven, Chief of Staff of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces in the Ostland, to the Reichskommissariat Ostland. Quoted in Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956) 186.

41. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988) 259.

42. Michael Aronson, "The Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia in 1881," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambrozo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 49.

43. Shlomo Lambrozo, "The Pogroms of 1903–1906," in *Pogroms*, ed. Klier and Lambrozo, 195–247. The reference to the pogrom in Minsk is on p. 230.

44. Peter Kenez, "Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War," in *Pogroms*, ed. Klier and Lambrozo, 293–313.

45. Leonid Smilovitzky, "The Jewish Farmers in Belarus during the 1920s," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 9 (1–2) (Spring 1997): 61 n. 4. Smilovitsky cites the Belarus State Archive, fond 701, opis 1, delo 43, p. 20. The contrast presented between Ukraine and Byelorussia is not meant to belittle the suffering of Byelorussian Jews during the Russian Civil War. In addition to the 1,100 who were killed, 7,096 were beaten, 150 were wounded, and 1,250 women were raped. But the corresponding figures for Ukrainian Jews would have been incrementally higher.

46. Smilovitsky, "Jewish Farmers in Belarus," 61.

47. Vakar, *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*, 34.

48. David R. Marples, *Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) 9.

49. Cholvavsky, *Be'Sufat ha'Kilayon*, 20–21.

50. Abraham Liessen, quoted in Cholvavsky, *B'Sufat ha-Kilayon*, 22.

51. Cholvavsky, *Be'Sufat ha'Kilayon*, 16, 20. According to the 1939 census, 31 percent of the Minsk population at that time was Jewish. P. G. Podiachikh, *Usesoiuznaia perepis' Naseleniia 1939 goda*, 29. On natural increase elsewhere making up for emigration, see Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003) 99. On the decrease in the Byelorussian Jewish population, Steven L. Guthier, "The Byelorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897–1970; Part 1, 1897–1939," *Soviet Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Jan. 1977): 52–53. Guthier gives a figure of 54 percent for the Jewish population of Minsk in 1897. David R. Marples gives the figure of 58.8 percent for the same year (*Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996] 9).

52. Guthier, "Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation," 43.
53. Vakar, *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*, 32–33.
54. Nicholas P. Vakar summarizes the Byelorussian nationalist view of this history in *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*, 40–42; in *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993) 9–10, Jan Zaprudnik traces "the earliest embodiment of statehood on Belarusan territories" to the tenth or eleventh century and describes Belarus's past as having been "liberated . . . from the prison of Russified Communist dogmas."
55. For accounts of the early history of Byelorussia, see Vakar, *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*; Zaprudnik, *Belarus*, chaps. 1 and 2; and Ivan Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule, 1917–1957* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 1972), chap. 1. On pressures on Byelorussians to join the Uniate Church in the wake of the Religious Union of Brest, see Zaprudnik, 38–40.
56. For accounts of the Byelorussian uprising of 1831, see Zaprudnik, *Belarus*, 49–50; Vakar, *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*, 68–70.
57. Zaprudnik, *Belarus*, 38.
58. For accounts of the uprising of 1863 and the repression that followed it, see Vakar, *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*, 70–72; Zaprudnik, *Belarus*, 55–48.
59. On *Homan*, see Zaprudnik, *Belarus*, 58–60.
60. On the formation of the Hramada, see Vakar, *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*, 84–87; Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule*, 6, 9.
61. On *Nasha niva*, see Vakar, *Belorussia: Making of a Nation*, 87–91; Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule*, 7.
62. Jan Tomasz Gross, "The Sovietization of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (London: MacMillan, 1991) 66.
63. In the four waves of deportations from western Ukraine and western Byelorussia between February 1940 and the German attack on the Soviet Union of June 22, 1941, roughly 50 percent of the approximately half a million deportees were ethnic Poles, 30 percent were Jews, and 20 percent were ethnic Ukrainians or Byelorussians. Gross, "Sovietization of Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia," 72–73. Jews comprised approximately 10 percent of the population in this region. Dov Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939–41* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995) 18.
64. Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule*, 70.
65. On the reception of Soviet rule in the Byelorussian countryside, see Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule*, 74–76.
66. See Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule*, chap. 5 ("Belorussia under the New Economic Policy"), 62–79, and chap. 6 ("A Golden Age of Belorussian Culture"), 80–92.
67. Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge: Politics in Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956) 57; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 223; Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 348.
68. Raissa Grigorievna Khasenyevich, interview, Minsk, September 16, 2003; and Eleanora Suleimanovna Banach (Raissa's daughter), interview, Minsk, November 20, 2004.

69. Moishe Kulbak, *Zelmanyanyer* (New York: CYCO-Bikher Farlag, 1953).
70. Alexei Vasilivich Chernenko, “Report on Underground Activity in Minsk,” NARB delo 4, list 33a, document 659, p. 143.
71. Dina Girsheva Beinson (former partisan of Stalin Partisan Detachment 208, Communist Party member since 1945), memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/1.

### CHAPTER 3. THE MINSK GHETTO

1. “On the Question of the Party Underground in the City of Minsk, During the Years of the Great Patriotic War, June 1941–July 1942,” compiled by T. Gorbunov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, et al., pp. 3–4, n.d. [presumably 1959], Papers of Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director, National Archives of the Republic of Belarus.
2. Hersh Dobin’s novel *Der Koyakh fun Lebn* (The Power of Life) (Moscow: Farlag Sovietski Pisatel, 1969) describes Minsk at the beginning of the war.
3. The film, by H. Rappoport, was entitled *Professor Mamlock*. Mikhail Treister remembered having seen this film (interview, Minsk, September 20, 2003). It was also mentioned in an interview with Ludmilla Iosifovna Machulenko in O. M. Arkadeva, L. L. Geller-Martinova, T. S. Kurdadze, and D. I. Rusakovskaya, *Na Perekrestkakh Sudeb: Iz Vospominanii Bybshikh Uznikov Geto i Prabednikov Narodov Mira* (At the Crossroads of Fate: From the Memoirs of Former Prisoners of the Ghetto and Righteous Gentiles) (Minsk: Four Quarters Publishing House, 2001) 98, and by Sarah Goland, Shoah Foundation Interview 24994, December 16, 1996, tape 1.
4. Shalom Cholavsky, *Be’Sufat ha’Kilayon: Yaxadut Byelorussia ha’Mizraxit be’Milxemet ha’Olam ha’Sheniya* (In the Storm of Destruction: The Jews of Eastern Byelorussia during the Second World War) (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, 1988) 91. Dan Zhits quotes a report by Einsatzgroup B that “all the Jewish intellectuals of Minsk have been exterminated (teachers, professors, lawyers, etc., except for doctors).” Dan Zhits, *Gito Minsk ve’Toldotav le’Or ha’Teud be’Xadash* (The History of the Minsk Ghetto in Light of the New Documentation), Basic Research Materials Series no. 13 (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2000) 13.
5. Sarah Goland’s husband, Israel, was among those taken to the Minsk prison from Drozdy; he was a Communist but did not respond when his name was called, and was released into the ghetto. Shoah Foundation Interview 24994, December 16, 1996, tape 1.
6. The camp at Drozdy is described in the memoir of Abram Yoselovich Relkin, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/169, and also in Dobin’s novel *Der Koyakh fun Lebn*. The internment in the Minsk prison is described in the memoir of Mikhail Morkukhovich Grechanik, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/8.
7. The order establishing the ghetto is reprinted in R. A. Chernoglazova, ed., *Judenfrei! Svobodno ot Evreyev! A History of the Minsk Ghetto in Documents* (Minsk: Osobny Dakh, 1999) 31.
8. Mikhail Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003.
9. For the Minsk population in 1939, see the *All-Soviet Census of Population, 1939* [in Russian] (Moscow: Nauka, 1992) 70.



10. Zelig Yafo, memoir, October 1978, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/4125, p. 16.
11. Zhits, *Gito Minsk*, 37.
12. Lydia Antonovna Bashkevich and Galina Antonovna Kazak, interview, Minsk, September 19, 2003.
13. Mikhail Mikhailovich Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003. There was a Byelorussian policeman stationed at the fence on the foot of Opanskovo Street who routinely accepted bribes and paid no attention to the exchange that was taking place at the fence.
14. Quoted in G.D. Knatko, *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto* (Minsk, 1999) 55 n. 21.
15. From Ya'akov Grinstein's description of the ghetto when he entered it, in "Umkum un Vidershtand af Vaysrusisher Erd, 1941–45" (*Annihilation and Resistance in the Territory of Byelorussia, 1941–45*) [manuscript in Yiddish].
16. *All-Soviet Census of Population, 1939*, 70.
17. Anna S. Machis, "The Minsk Ghetto," NARB fond 4, opis 33a, korobka 86, delo 656, p. 183.
18. Hersh Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989) 52.
19. In her memoir, *Briefe meiner Erinnerung: Mein Überleben im jüdischen Ghetto von Minsk 1941/42* (*Letters of My Memory: My Survival in the Jewish Ghetto of Minsk, 1941–42*) (Villigst, Germany: Haus Villigst, 1991) 73, Anna Krasnopyorka describes an incident in which a friend, Fima Osinovskiy, joined a group of four on a street in the ghetto, making the fifth, and was shot to death by a German.
20. Testimony of Zelig Yafo, interviewed by Yitzhak Alperovitz, Tel Aviv, October 1978, Yiddish transcript, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/4125, p. 10.
21. Dan Zhits writes that Mushkin was not a member of the Communist Party. *Gito Minsk*, 30. Zelig Yafo, the son of Moishe Yoffe, Mushkin's translator and assistant on the Judenrat, writes that Mushkin was a Communist. Zelig Yafo, memoir, October 1978, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/4125, p. 11. Since Yafo knew Mushkin, I follow his account.
22. Zhits, *Gito Minsk*, 30.
23. Yuri Ilich Taits, memoir, November 1979, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/17.
24. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 25.
25. Sophia Sadovskaya, "Sparks in the Night," in *Through Fire and Death*, ed. V. Karpov (Minsk, 1970), 73–85. Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/16.
26. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 71.
27. Zhits, *Gito Minsk*, 61.
28. Grinstein, "Umkum un Vidershtand," 61.
29. Zelig Yafo (son of Moishe Yoffe) memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/4125.
30. Hinda Nechamchik (Tassman), interview, Bat Yam, Israel, November 13, 2000.
31. In a report on the ghetto underground that she wrote for the partisans after having escaped the ghetto, Anna Semyonovna Machis estimated that about 5,000 people were killed in the course of the raids of August 14, 25, and 31,

1941. A. S. Machis, December 1943, “The Minsk Ghetto,” NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656, p. 185/6. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, a leader of the ghetto underground, estimated, in a report written after the war, that more than 10,000 Jews were killed during these raids. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, “Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto,” NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 1.

32. Grinstein, “Umkum un Vidershtand,” 23–26.

33. Ya’akov Ruvenovich Mogilnitzky, interview, Minsk, October 5, 1999. For several months after leaving the ghetto Ya’akov lived from hand to mouth, working for local peasants and sleeping in barns. Everyone in the area, Mogilnitzky said, knew that he was a Jew, and when Germans or Byelorussians appeared in the area, people there would warn him and tell him where to hide. In early January 1942, hungry and cold, he knocked on the door of a house in the village of Piatnitskoye. An elderly man opened the door and invited him in. The man, Sergei Trafimovich, said that he could see that Ya’akov was a Jew. He said that all his life he had worked with Jews, and that Ya’akov could stay with him and his family. Ya’akov remained there for nearly a year. In the fall of 1942 someone told the Germans that Trafimovich was hiding a Jew. Germans came to the house when Ya’akov was not there and beat Trafimovich badly; he later died of his injuries. Ya’akov left the household and returned to sleeping in barns. Trafimovich’s daughter persuaded a local partisan unit to take Ya’akov in, arguing that his knowledge of “German” (actually Yiddish) would be useful to them.

34. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 41.

35. Mikhail Timofeevich Novodorsky, memoir, in *Na Perekrestkakh Sudeb*, ed. Arkadeva et al., 113–36.

36. See *Judenfrei! Svobodno ot Evreyev!* ed. Chernoglazova, documents 113 and 118, pp. 162 and 167.

37. Knatko writes: “According to various testimonies, from 12 to 17 thousand people were shot.” *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto*, 49. Anna Semyonovna Machis writes that 12,000 or 13,000 Jews were killed during this pogrom. “Minsk Ghetto,” p. 187/8.

38. Comrade (Danil) Kudryakov, memoir, NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 661.

39. Raissa Khasanyevich, interview, Minsk, September 16, 2003.

40. Knatko writes: “According to the testimony of witnesses, up to 10 thousand people were shot” in this pogrom. *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto*, 50. Ghetto underground member Anna Semyonovna Machis reports that approximately 5,000 Jews were killed. “Minsk Ghetto,” NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656, p. 185/6.

41. Hersh Smolar, interview, April 1972, conducted, in Yiddish, by Yitzchak Alperovitz, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, pp. 49–50.

42. Grinstein, “Umkum un Vidershtand,” Yad Vashem Archives, 033/465, p. 110.

43. NARB, delo 4683, list 3, document 1056, p. 223. Quoted in Knatko, *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto*, 50.

44. Knatko gives the figure of 6,000 and cites NARB fond 4683, list 3, document 991, p. 96, and document 913, p. 58. *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto*, 50.

But she notes that official German documents give the figure of 3,412. This may refer to those killed at the ravine; more were killed elsewhere.

45. Knatko, *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto*, 51. The estimates of numbers are those of ghetto survivor P. Ya. Dobin and German witness (and perpetrator) Hess. NARB delo 4, list 29, document 112, pp. 462, 497.

46. Yocheved Rubenchik (Iberman), “Lo Le’Shem Itur G’vura,” (Not for the Sake of a Medal of Honor), in *Minsk Ir ve’Em* (Minsk, Mother-City), 371–78.

47. Hila Gordon, interview, Migdal ha’Emek, Israel, November 9, 2000.

48. Hersh Smolar, interview, May 25, 1972, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 50. Anna Semyonovna Machis reports that 3,000 German Jews were killed during this pogrom. “Minsk Ghetto,” NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656, p. 197/19.

49. Smolar gives this estimate. *Minsk Ghetto*, 108. He points out that German documents give the number 8,794, but that number did not include people in hiding in the ghetto, most of them women and children. Knatko refers to a report of the City Commissar in the City of Minsk, according to which there were 9,472 Jews capable of work in the city (and presumably in the ghetto) in November 1942. *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto*, 41.

50. Grinstein, “Umkum un Vidershtand,” Yad Vashem Archives, 033/465, p. 100.

51. Mikhail Treister, interview, Minsk, September 20, 2003.

52. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 142.

53. Rosa Yefimovna Zelenko, born Zuckerman, interview, Minsk, July 10, 2000.

54. Aaron Fiterson, memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/19, p. 30.

#### CHAPTER 4. THE GHETTO UNDERGROUND

1. The figure for the population of Minsk is from the *All-Soviet Census of Population, 1939* [in Russian] (Moscow: Nauka, 1992) 70. The figures for Communist Party and Komsomol membership are from an account of the Minsk underground compiled under the aegis of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia in 1959: T. Gorbunov et al., “On the Question of the Party Underground in the City of Minsk, During the Years of the Great Patriotic War, June 1941–July 1942, p. 1, Papers of Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director, National Archives of the Republic of Belarus.

2. Yenta Pesahovna Maizles, memoir, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 80, p. 5.

3. Yenta Pesahovna Maizles, memoir, p. 3.

4. Biographical details for Smolar (Smolyar, Grigorii [Girsh] Davydovich) are based on NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656, pp. 185, 192, 340–90.

5. Smolar describes the formation of his secret group in *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989) 27–31.

6. Biographical details for these members of the underground are based on information culled from NARB files by the director of the archives, Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, and presented in his paper “Members of the Underground Organization Which Functioned in the Territory of the Minsk Ghetto during the Great Patriotic War,” in my possession, and also on the biographical sketches of members of the Minsk underground in *Minskae Antifashistskae Padpolye* (The

Minsk Anti-Fascist Underground) (Minsk: Belarus, 1995) [in Belorussian and Russian], hereafter *MAP*. For Nahum Feldman, *MAP*, p. 119. Feldman went to a partisan unit in April 1942, where he was killed. For Chipchin, *MAP*, p. 122. Chipchin was arrested and hung May 7, 1942. The details for Lena Maizles (Maizles, Yenta Pesachovna) are based on NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 100, pp. 14, 177; fond 4386, opis 2, delo 80; fond 3500, opis 5, delo 97; fond 3500, opis 4, delo 136, pp. 12–14. She survived the war. The details for Zyama Okun (Okun, Zalman Mironovich) are based on NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 100, pp. 16, 199; fond 3500, opis 6, delo 172, p. 2. Okun was killed in the ghetto.

7. Nahum Feldman describes the organization and history of his group in two accounts that he wrote after the war: N. L. Feldman, memoir, NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, and “On the Communist Underground in Minsk during the Great Patriotic War, Memoir of N. L. Feldman,” Yad Vashem Archives, M41/18.

8. Yenta Pesachovna Maizles, memoir, NARB, fond 4386, opis 2, delo 80, p. 3.

9. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 34.

10. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 35.

11. See Chaimovich’s memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196. Also *MAP*, p. 195 (Boris Pavlovitch Chaimovich [Faivelovitch]). He went to a partisan unit in November or December 1941 and survived the war.

12. See the memoir of Nechama Ruditzer, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196; and of Boris Faivelovich Chaimovich, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196.

13. For details on Misha (Mikhail Leybovich) Gebelev, see NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 100, pp. 6, 69; fond 3500, opis 6, delo 262, p. 186; fond 3500, opis 3, delo 143, p. 4.

14. Anna Kupreyeva, “Study of the Activity of the Territorial Group That Functioned in the Ghetto in the Area of Tatarskaya Street,” NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1198, pp. 8–10. Also the memoir of Yevgenia Aronovich Elterman, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196.

15. Tzypa Yankelevna Botvinik-Lupian, memoir, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 59, pp. 1–2.

16. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 29.

17. Boris Faivelovich Chaimovich, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, p. 93 (186).

18. Yenta Pesachovna Maizles, memoir, NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, p. 167.

19. Rosa Lipskaya, Anna Semyonovna Machis (Levina), and Hersh Smolar, in reports on the ghetto underground, all wrote that there were twelve desyatkas in the ghetto; Machis specifies in February 1942. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto, NARB fond 4385, opis 2, delo 77, p. 2; Supplement to Memoirs of Anna Semyonovna Machis (Levina), fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, p. 7/168; Hersh Smolar, “The Population of the Minsk Ghetto in the Struggle against German Invaders,” 8. But Anna P. Kupreyeva, who conducted research on the Minsk ghetto underground for the Institute of History of the Belorussian Communist Party, gives the

number as sixteen on the basis of interviews with survivors who were still living at that time, as well as written documents. Six of the groups that Kupreyeva lists were composed of people who died during the war; thus only the names of the heads of these groups is known. Other groups may have existed as well from which no one survived, and of which there is no record. Anna P. Kupreyeva, "The Activity of the Underground Party Organization in the Minsk Ghetto," Report Prepared by Senior Scholar of the Institute of History of the Belorussian Academy of Science, 16 December 1981. NARB 4683, opis 3, delo 1197, pp. 45–52. This list, however, apparently does not include the groups of Komsomol members. In an interview in Israel in 1972 Smolar described the underground as consisting of about 450 members, including about 150 Komsomol members (Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 97).

20. Boris Faivelovich Chaimovich, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, p. 94.

21. For Motye Pruslin's details (Pruslin, Matvei Mendelevich), see NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 100, pp. 17, 221. Pruslin went to a partisan unit in March 1942 and was killed there. (References to members of the Minsk underground in documents held by the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus are based on a summary given me by Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director). Gebelev's details are from NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 100, pp. 6, 69; fond 3500, opis 6, delo 262, p. 186; fond 3500, opis 3, delo 143, p. 4.

22. Smolar describes this meeting as having taken place in October, but Anna Kupreyeva writes that it took place in November. A. P. Kupreyeva, "The Activity of the Underground Party Organization in the Minsk Ghetto," NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1197, p. 14. Document dated Dec. 16, 1981. Smolar mentions this meeting in "Population of the Minsk Ghetto," 5. In Smolar's report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, "Minsk Underground/the Underground Organization in Minsk Ghetto, July 1941–August 1942," Smolar writes that the meeting with Kazinietz took place two days before the meeting at which the Minsk underground was founded. Kupreyeva, who quotes this document, points out that if this is the case, then the meeting between Smolar and Kazinietz must have taken place in November. Kupreyeva, who attended a meeting of survivors of the Minsk ghetto underground in 1954–55, quotes Yenta (Lena) Pesachovna Maizles' remark at that meeting concerning a meeting of Communist activists in the ghetto in October 1941 called by Gebelev. According to Maizles a comrade from the Russian district, who was present at that meeting, described the growing partisan movement in the forests around Minsk and urged ghetto activists to help the partisans, to collect and hide arms for those going to the forest, and to get jobs in German plants and conduct acts of sabotage. Maizles' statement is in Minutes of the Meeting of the Former Participants in the Communist Underground in Minsk . . . held in Minsk in December 1954–January 1955 (NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 839), p. 68. Also quoted in Kupreyeva, p. 14.

23. Smolar, *Resistance in Minsk* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1966) 21.

24. In his April 1972 Yad Vashem interview, Smolar said that in 1961 he examined documents, protocols from a meeting of members of the city underground,

in which Kazinietz reported to his comrades on his meeting with Smolar, described Smolar as a member of the Communist International, and argued that given Smolar's experience, his views must be taken seriously. Smolar said that he saw these documents in an institute in Minsk, and that apparently they later disappeared. In support of his view, he cited the fact that Ivan Novikov said the same in his well-researched novel about the Minsk underground, *Ruiny Strelyaiut v Upor* (The Ruins Shoot Straight) (Minsk: Belarus Press, 1977). Smolar's interview: Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 34.

25. Fyodor Davidovich Shedletsky (former partisan of the Stalin Partisan Regiment 208 and Partisan Brigade "Byelorussia"), memoir, Yad Vashem Archives M41/49, p. 6.

26. Fyodor Davidovich Shedletsky, memoir, p. 12; Smolar, "Population of the Minsk Ghetto," manuscript, p. 13.

27. In his manuscript "The Population of the Minsk Ghetto in the Struggle against the German Invaders," which he wrote soon after the war, Smolar referred to Kazinietz as Slavek and wrote: "The real name of this comrade who fell in April 1942 and was one of the leaders of the Minsk Communist underground, is still unknown" (p. 5).

28. Reuben Ainsztein describes this in *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Eastern Europe* (Paul Elek: London, 1974) 895 n. 47. Smolar, in his 1972 Yad Vashem interview, mentioned that some said that Kazinietz was a Jew, but, he said, there was no proof that this was the case. Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 37.

29. Anna Semyonovna Machis, "The Minsk Ghetto," NARB fond 4, opis 33a, korobka 86, delo 656, p. 185. Machis was a ghetto survivor who wrote this report in a partisan detachment in December 1943.

30. For the varying estimates of numbers of Jews killed in the series of pogroms in the Minsk ghetto, and the sources of these estimates, see G.D. Knatko, *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto* (Minsk: National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, 1999) 49–51 [in English and Russian].

31. Leib Kulik (Kulik, Lev Yakovlevich), thirty-three years old, was a Communist Party member. He was the head of the underground group in the Jewish Hospital and was executed in December 1942. MAP, p. 78.

32. Smolar, interview, April 1972, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, pp. 40–41. Zyama Serebriansky should not be confused with Zyama Okun. Zyama Okun was a member of Feldman's underground group in the ghetto; he was assigned by the underground to join the ghetto police. Zyama Serebriansky was the head of the ghetto police, and was thus a member of the Judenrat. Serebriansky, along with Mushkin and others, had been in touch with members of underground groups in the city before Kazinietz ordered the ghetto underground to begin working with members of the Judenrat, such as Serebriansky, whom he considered underground members.

33. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 37–38. See also the memoir of Sophia Sadvorskaya, "Sparks in the Night," in *Through Fire and Death*, ed. V. Karpov (Minsk, 1970) 73–85. Yad Vashem Archives, M41/16.

34. Smolar describes this meeting in *Minsk Ghetto*, 59–61, and in his April 1972 Yad Vashem interview (Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 40). On relations

between the ghetto underground and the Judenrat, see also Sholem Cholvsky, *Be'Sufat ha'Kilayon: Yaxadut Byelorussia ha'Mizraxit be'Milxemet ha'Olam ha'Sheniya* (In the Storm of Destruction: The Jews of Eastern Byelorussia during the Second World War) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1988) 114–16.

35. Smolar, *Resistance in Minsk*, 18.

36. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 40.

37. Smolar, interview, April 25, 1972, Yad Vashem Archives 03/3605, pp. 41–42.

38. NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 18, p. 18. See also Kupreyeva, p. 9.

39. The woman with whom Pruslina placed her daughter Zinaida was later arrested. A neighbor took Zinaida and placed her in an orphanage, from which she was later transferred to another orphanage. After liberation, Pruslina conducted an extensive search for her daughter and found her. Zinaida Andreevna still lives in Minsk and provided extensive help for this study.

40. Chasya Pruslina, Report to the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party, On Underground Activities during the Great Patriotic War (1941–44), pp. 10–11.

41. Nechama Tec and Daniel Weiss, “A Historical Injustice: The Case of Masha Bruskina,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1997): 366–77.

42. Sarah Levina, memoir, in Vladimir Borisovich Karpov, archival materials, fond 305, opis 1, delo 311, p. 6, Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Minsk.

43. In *Minsk Ghetto*, 70, Smolar writes: “We organized a special women’s group of our members . . . to stay in constant touch with a similar group of Byelorussian women . . . to set up places that could shelter Jewish children either with Byelorussian families or in children’s homes.” This is correct, but it does not acknowledge that the effort was initiated by Chasya Pruslina in the ghetto and by Lilya Revinskaya and Ludmila Kasheshkina outside it (Raissa Andreevna Chernoglazova, interview, September 15, 2005; her comments were based on her memory of statements at a meeting of survivors of the Minsk underground in Minsk, December 1954–January 1955). In *Minsk Ghetto*, 63, Smolar writes: “We began making preparations to send out with Fedya the first organized group from the ghetto. Responsibility for this was given to Boris Haimovich [who] immediately got in touch with . . . Kudriakov.” Yevsei Lvovich Shnitman, who was one of the organizers of this group, describes it as having been organized by members of the Chaimovich/Ruditzer group in cooperation with underground leaders from the city. He does not mention Smolar. NARB fond 4683, opis 2, delo 77, pp. 139–40, 218, 219. Boris Chaimovich does not address the question of who initiated the organization of the group that he led to the partisans, but writes that there were some errors in Smolar’s book *Mstiteli Geto* (Ghetto Avengers) [the Russian version of Smolar’s 1946 book *Fun Minsker Geto*] and that he does not remember having been present at an underground leadership meeting with Smolar, as Smolar claims. On the printing press, Smolar writes: “Misha Chipchin was assigned to organize the first illegal print-shop in the occupied Byelorussian capital. . . . In [the works of Soviet historians] in most cases there is no mention of the fact that it was the ghetto organization that planned and set up the shop” (*Minsk*



*Ghetto*, 34). Glafira Vasilievna Suslova writes in her memoir (November 1980, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/25, p. 8): “I’d like to say that Smolar in his book *Minsk Ghetto* misinterpreted the role of Podoprigora in the work of delivery of fonts to the publishing house and didn’t mention his [Podopriga’s] friends at all. If I remember it right, he wrote, ‘An underground publishing house was organized in the ghetto. Andrew Ivanovich Podoprigora . . . took part in the delivery of fonts.’ The author lied in his book. Where were the fonts from, the paper, the ink, who made the equipment for the publishing house? This was done by the fearless four, Podoprigora, Poloneichik, Troshin, Udod, and no one else. Slavka gave the assignment to Podoprigora, not to Smolar. Why not tell the truth?” Finally, Esfir Kissel pointed out that Smolar left out the fact that her husband, David Kissel, became the head of the ghetto underground after Smolar left the ghetto, and claimed that it was due to the fact that Kissel was arrested after the war for unrelated reasons and imprisoned. Anna Kupreyeva confirms Esfir Kissel’s claim that her husband David was head of the ghetto underground after Smolar left the ghetto, citing testimony by Smolar and by Nadya Shusser in Kissel’s August 30, 1945 hearing, case no. 2561. A. P. Kupreyeva, “Information on the Activity of the Underground Party Organization in the Minsk Ghetto,” December 16, 1981, pp. 37–38; NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1197.

44. Cholavsky accuses the City Committee of anti-Semitism for its failure to put the survival of Jews first: *Be’Sufat ha’Kilayon*, 174.

45. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 7. On Nina Liss’s effort to find a place to send the women and children of the ghetto, see a report written in December 1943 from a partisan detachment by Anna Semyonovna Machis-Levina, NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656, p. 188.

46. Smolar, interview, April 1972, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 37.

47. The formation and work of the Military Council is described in a report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia by Rafael Bromberg on December 15, 1942, from the village of Khvorostievo, in partisan territory. Bromberg, a Jew who remained outside the ghetto, belonged to the underground group of A. A. Markevich, which was aware of the City Committee but remained independent of it. Bromberg wrote that the Military Council was formed at the same time that other secret groups were formed in Minsk, beginning in August 1941, and that the Military Council was engaged in gathering arms, creating partisan units, recruiting members for them, and freeing prisoners of war. NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 657, p. 43.

48. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 68–69.

49. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 68–69.

50. The German intelligence report reads: “It is noteworthy, that the chiefs of the departments and Military Council leaders had a negative attitude to Jewish partisans, because they were cowards and could not be used actively. The major cause of the Jews’ interest in the partisan movement was their desire to get out of the ghetto; then they avoided any further activity and went their own way. So it happened, that the Military Council gave Jewish partisans false orders and wrong routes of getting to the partisans, and thus these groups were aimlessly wandering around and were in some cases caught by the Wehrmacht.” Reports



from the Occupied Eastern Regions #2, Berlin, May 8, 1942, Security Police and SD Chief, Command Headquarters, p. 4; NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 944, pp. 257, 259.

51. Cholvavsky, *Be'Sufat ha'Kilayon*, 152.

52. Cholvavsky, *Be'Sufat ha'Kilayon*, 153. Cholvavsky expresses the suspicion that the Germans concocted this plot in order to arrest and execute prisoners of war whom they suspected of hostility to German rule; he bases his suspicion of the German account on the absence of Soviet documents concerning this planned revolt. However, Smolar writes that Kazinietz knew of plans for a prisoner-of-war revolt, and that he and other members of the underground had helped to prepare for it. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 61–62.

53. Raissa Chernoglazova, interview, Minsk, November 2004.

54. Budayev, Veremeichik, Ivanoshok, Khmilevsky, Alexandrovich, memoirs, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, korobka 78, delo 837.

55. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 112. NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 661 contains statements by a number of underground members on their views about whether or not Kovalyov became an informer. See statements of Ivanoshok, Kalinovski, Korpucienka, Alexandrovich, and Saychik.

56. Chasya Pruslina describes this in her Report to the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party, 17–18.

57. N. M. Timchuk, memoir, NARB fond 4, 33a, delo 661.

58. Vladimir Kozochonok, Report to Ponomarenko, December 25, 1942, NARB fond 3, opis 33a, korobka 86, delo 6546.

59. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 71.

60. Fruma Davidson, transcript of interview no. 1293, March 3, 1969; Rachel Shimonovich, no. 1396, July 15, 1968; and Miriam Tukarski, no. 1306, April 1968 [in Yiddish], Archives, Oral History Project, Hebrew University. See also Cholvavsky, *Be'Sufat ha'Kilayon*, 115–16.

61. Sadovskaya, “Sparks in the Night,” p. 5, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/16.

62. Leah Zalmonovna Gutkovich, interview, Minsk, July 6, 2000.

63. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 85–86.

64. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 91.

65. Sarah Levina, memoir, in Karpov, archival materials, fond 305, opis 1, delo 311, p. 14/99, Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Minsk.

66. Anna Semyonovna Machis (Levina) describes the raids in the ghetto conducted by the Special Operations Group. Supplement to Memoirs of Anna Semyonovna Machis (Levina), fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, p. 10/171. Sarah Levina lured Epstein and other members of his group to a partisan unit, where they were killed. Sarah Levina, memoir, in Karpov, archival materials, fond 305, opis 1, delo 311. On the arrest of Dolsky and the death of Zorov, see Sadovskaya, “Sparks in the Night,” p. 6, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/16.

67. Ya'akov Grinstein, “Umkum un Vidershtand af Vaysrusisher Erd, 1941–45,” manuscript, Yad Vashem Archives, 033/465, pp. 83–84.

68. Sarah Goland, interview, Natzeret Ilit, November 14, 2000.

69. Chanah Israelevna Rubenchik describes having left for this unit on December 24, 1941, with a group that included workers from the radio factory

in the city, and a group of women from the ghetto. Some went to Bystrov's unit; others to another nearby unit. NARB fond 4, opis 33a, S. 84, doc. 644, p. 231/4.

70. The story of the ghetto underground's rescue of Ganzenko, his journey to the forest, and his appointment as head of the Budyonni partisan unit is told in Grinstein, "Umkum un Vidershstand," 72–74, and also in the memoir of Sarah Levina, in Karpov, archival materials, fond 305, opis 1, korobka 311, p. 9/94. Also, Ya'akov Grinstein, interview, Givatayim, Israel, November 12, 2000, and Tanya Lifshitz, interview, Bat Yam, Israel, November 10, 2000.

71. Zelig (Yoffe) Yafo, transcript of interview, Tel Aviv, October 1978, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3125. See also Smolar, "The Four-Day Massacre," in *Minsk Ghetto*, 98–101. Smolar gives a different account than does Zelig Yafo of the death of Zelig's father, Moishe Yoffe. According to Smolar, Yoffe and other members of the Judenrat stayed in the Judenrat building, which the Germans did not enter until the third day of the pogrom; when they entered it, they killed everyone there except for the members of the Special Operations Group and many of the ghetto police. According to Smolar, Yoffe begged the Germans to spare the members of the Judenrat (p. 100). But Zelig Yafo witnessed the death of his father, and Smolar, who was in the attic of the Jewish Hospital, did not.

72. Galina Knatko, *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto* (Minsk: National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, 1999) 51. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, in her Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto, fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 1, estimates that 10,000 Jews were killed during the raids of August 1941, 20,000 during the November 1941 pogroms, and 5,000 in the March 2, 1942, pogrom. She does not estimate the number killed during the July 1942 pogrom.

73. Knatko, *Annihilation of Minsk Ghetto*, 51, writes that, according to the report of the City Kommissar on the situation in Minsk, at the end of November 1942 there were 9,472 local Jews capable of work. Chasya Pruslina, in her Report to the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party, On Underground Activities during the Great Patriotic War (1941–44), wrote that approximately 9,000 Jews were left in the ghetto after the July 1942 pogrom. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, in her Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten, fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 1, gives the same number. However, Smolar points out that this figure included only those who worked, and leaves out those hiding in malinas; he gives the figure 12,000 (*Minsk Ghetto*, 108).

74. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 112.

75. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 108. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 6.

76. Anna Kupreyeva, "The Activity of the Underground Party Organization in the Minsk Ghetto," NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1197, pp. 37–40.

77. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 108. Sarah Goland, "Life on the Occupied Territory in Minsk 1941–1944," memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/5215, pp. 19–20. Sarah Goland, interview, Natzeret Ilit, November 14, 2000.

78. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, Report of the Secretary of an Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 8.

## CHAPTER 5. SOLIDARITY IN WARTIME MINSK

1. As of January 1, 1997, only 240 people in Belarus and Russia combined had been awarded the title of Righteous Gentile, in comparison to 4,954 in Poland, 3,944 in the Netherlands, 1,556 in France, and numbers greater than the Belarusian/Russian figure of 240 in Belgium, Ukraine, the Czech and Slovak republics, Hungary, Lithuania, and Germany. The small number in Russia/Belarus reflected a lack of interest on the part of Yad Vashem in locating such people in these countries, as well as a low number of applications. Leonid Smilovitsky, "Righteous Gentiles, the Partisans, and Jewish Survival in Belorussia, 1941–1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1997): 320.

2. Alexander Alexandrovich Markevich was thirty-seven years old when the war began, and a member of the Communist Party. *Minskae Antifashistskae Padpolye* (Minsk: Belarus, 1995) 83, gives his date of birth but not his membership in the Communist Party; Mikhail Kantorovich told me that Leokadia Fleischer, who was a member of the group's steering committee, told him that Markevich was a member of the party. Mikhail Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, October 8, 1999.

3. Alexander Markevich, Report on the Activity of the Underground Party Committee in the City of Minsk from July 1941 until May 9 1943, NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656. Soon after the ghetto was established, seventeen-year-old Mikhail (Misha) Kantorovich left the ghetto and went to the house in the city where he and his family had lived before the war, to get a change of clothes. He was on good terms with the people who had moved in, and they suggested to him that he also go to a house where relatives of his had lived; good people had moved into that house, he was told. Misha took their suggestion and met a woman in her early thirties, Leokadia Fleischer, who drew him into a conversation. She asked him if he had been a Komsomol member (he had) and how he felt about the Germans (he hated them, especially because of the way they were treating the Jews). Upon hearing these responses Fleischer invited Misha to join the struggle against the fascists. Under her direction, he formed a group in the ghetto that distributed underground literature. Fleischer also invited Misha to take refuge in her house if he needed to. When the Second City Committee was destroyed and mass arrests began, in late September 1942, members of the Markevich Group as well as of the main underground fled to the forest. Fleischer left for the forest at this time, with a small group that included Misha, who had been hiding in her apartment for several months. Mikhail Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, October 8, 1999, July 5, 2000, and September 17, 2003.

4. Mikhail Chipchin was thirty-nine years old, Zalman Okun thirty-four. Iosif Kaplan's date of birth is not known. MAP, pp. 122, 96, 153. None were members of the Communist Party, as far as is known. All died during the war. Iosif Kaplan's brother and a man named Pressman were also members of this group, but nothing is known about either of them beyond their family names.

5. Mikhail Sidorovich Poloneichik, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196; Glafira Vasilienva Suslova, memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/25. The memoirs of N. L. Feldman, fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, and of Antonina Andreyevna Melentovich, fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, also men-

tion the underground printing press created by the two groups of workers in the Proryv Printing House.

6. Mikhail Sidorovich Poloneichik, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, p. 4.

7. N. L. Feldman, memoir, NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, p. 220.

8. In *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), Smolar takes credit for having ordered this project, but it is clear from the memoirs of Poloneichik, Feldman, and Suslova, cited above, that it was Kazinetz, not Smolar, who gave Podoprigora and the others the assignment of creating an underground press.

9. N. L. Feldman, “On the Communist Underground in Minsk during the Great Patriotic War,” memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/18, p. 6.

10. Glafira Vasilievna Suslova, memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/25, p. 7.

11. Antonina Andreyevna Melentovich, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, p. 17.

12. The young woman whom Suslova was hiding was the daughter of the surgeon, Professor Yuri Markovich Irger; she used the name Rita Ivanova, which was the name given on a false document that Podoprigora had provided for her. Glafira Vasilievna Suslova, memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/25, p. 11.

13. The following account of Bronya Goffman’s work for the underground is based on two interviews with her (Minsk, September 30, 1999, and July 18, 2000), and on memoirs that she wrote after the war, NARB fond 4, opis 33a, korobka 87, delo 667, February 12, 1945 (handwritten), and fond 750, opis 1, delo 307.

14. Bronya Goffman, interview, Minsk, July 18, 2000.

15. Biographical details for Bronya Borisovna Goffman, *MAP*, p. 46; the Voronovs (Mikhail Petrovich and Mikhail Mikhailovich), *MAP*, p. 44; and for Vasili Ivanovich Saychik, *MAP*, p. 104.

16. One of those who visited Bronya while she was in hiding, Shura (Alexandra) Yanulis, survived the war, and she and Bronya remained lifelong friends.

17. Bronya Goffman, interview, Minsk, July 18, 2000.

18. Vladimir Stepanich Kozachyonok, memoir, NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 661. Saychik was the second underground member who worked with this press; Kazachyonok identifies the third underground member involved in the publication of the last leaflet as Zhan, the pseudonym for Ivan Konstantinovich Kabushkin, a member of the City Committee who escaped the September arrests but who was arrested later and died in prison in February 1943.

19. T. Gorbunov et al., “On the Question of the Party Underground in the City of Minsk, During the Years of the Great Patriotic War, June 1941–July 1942,” p. 39, Papers of Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director, National Archives of the Republic of Belarus.

20. This account is drawn from the memoir of Mikhail Mordukhovich Gretchanik, April 2, 1980, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/8, pp. 8–9, and of Maria Lazarevna Plaks, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196.

21. Vladimir Semyonovich Dolgin, interview, Minsk, July 17, 2000. Dolgin says that the German commander in charge of the heating system workers, whose name was Schultz, was involved in the plot as well; Chaim Gravetz, the head of the underground group, convinced the rest to include him. Dolgin’s

account conflicts with that of Gretchanik, who describes the workers involved in this plot as non-Jews. Since Dolgin was closer to these events, I give more credence to his account than to Gretchanik's.

22. Mikhail Mordukhovich Gretchanik, memoir, April 2, 1980, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/8, pp. 11–12.

23. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 79.

24. Slava Solomonovna Gebeleva-Astashinskaya, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 837, p. 7.

25. Yenta Pesachovna Maizles, NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, p. 169.

26. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 5. Tzypa Yankelevna Botvinik-Lupian was a member of the Communist Party who survived the war. NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 59. Ekaterina Israelevna Tzirlina was nineteen years old at the beginning of the war and a member of Kom-somol. Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/21.

27. Yenta Pesachovna Maizles, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 80, pp. 8–9, and NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, p. 168.

28. Ekaterina Israelevna Tzirlina, memoir, 1982, Yad Vashem Archives, M 41/21, p. 3.

29. Tzypa Yankelevna Botvinik-Lupian, memoir, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 59, pp. 9–11.

30. Rosa Efroimovna Lipskaya, Report of the Secretary of the Underground Group of Ten in the Minsk Ghetto, NARB fond 4386, opis 2, delo 77, p. 10.

31. Sarah Goland, interview, Nazaret Ilit, Israel, November 14, 2000.

32. Sarah Goland, memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/5215, p. 12.

33. This meeting took place in October 1942. The Second City Committee had been destroyed and with it the ghetto's contacts with partisan units. Sarah Levina, who was present at the meeting with Bronya that Ya'akov Grinstein describes, wrote: "In October a liaison from the partisan detachment Frunze, a teacher, Bronya Zavala, came to the ghetto. Her appearance in the ghetto was like a miracle to us. At the end of September and in October, there were mass arrests of underground members in Minsk, and then suddenly she appears." Sarah Levina, memoir, Vladimir Borisovich Karpov, archival materials, fond 305, opis 1, delo 311, p. 12/97, Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Minsk.

34. Ya'akov Grinstein, "Umkum un Vidershtand af Vaysrusisher Erd, 1941–45" (Annihilation and Resistance in the Territory of Byelorussia, 1941–45) 57–65, Yad Vashem Archives, 033/465. This is the manuscript in Yiddish for Grinstein's account of his wartime experiences that was published in Hebrew as *Ud me'Kikar ha'Yovel* (A Survivor of Jubilee Square) (Israel: Beit Loxamei ha-Getaot, 1969).

35. Sarah Goland, memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, 033C/953; and interview, Nazaret Ilit, Israel, November 14, 2000.

36. List of orphanages and kindergartens in Minsk, September 29, 1941, NARB fond 370, opis 1, delo 141a, p. 133.

37. Grigori Rozinsky, *Deti Minskovo Geto* (Children of the Minsk Ghetto) (Tel Aviv, 2004) 50, provides the text of an interview with Galina Orlova, the

wife of Vasili Semyonovich Orlov, who was in charge of orphanages in Minsk during the war. Orlova lists sixteen orphanages.

38. This account is based on Hersh Smolar's description of how children were taken out of the ghetto in "The Population of the Minsk Ghetto in the Struggle against the German Invaders," *Minsk Ghetto*, 69–70 (a document by Hersh Smolar, in the papers of Chasya Pruslina, held by her daughter, Zinaida Alexeevna Nikodemova), and an interview with Raissa Andreevna Chernoglazova, Minsk, September 15, 2003, in which Chernoglazova recalled accounts given her by Sarah Levina and other survivors who participated in this campaign.

39. Raissa Chernoglazova, interview, Minsk, November 2004.

40. Chasya Pruslina, Report to the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party, On Underground Activities during the Great Patriotic War (1941–44), manuscript in my possession, p. 10. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 70.

41. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 46.

42. Interview with Galina, wife of Vasilii Orlov, cited in Rozinsky, *Deti Minskovo Geto*, 50–51.

43. Rozinsky, *Deti Minskovo Geto*, 15.

44. Rozinsky, *Deti Minskovo Geto*, 52.

45. Rozinsky, *Deti Minskovo Geto*, 49.

46. Smolar does not mention David Kissel's role as head of the ghetto underground in the fall of 1942 in either of his books about the Minsk ghetto. Esfir Kissel believes that Smolar omitted mention of her husband because soon after the war David Kissel was charged with Trotskyism and arrested. He spent fifteen years in prison before being exonerated. Esfir Kissel and Frieda Aslyosova, interviews, Minsk, October 5, 1999, and September 11, 2003.

47. Esfir Kissel and Frieda Aslyosova, interviews, Minsk, October 5, 1999, and September 11, 2003; Frieda Aslyosova, interview conducted by Anika Walke, Minsk, October 9, 2002.

48. David's mother, Rosalie Taubkin, was captured trying to leave the ghetto through the wire fence to meet with Byelorussian relatives. *Dos Svartzet Bukh* (The Black Book) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1984) 169.

49. David Taubkin, interview, Petah Tikvah, Israel, November 6, 2000. Also, David Taubkin, "Minulo: Shestdesyat Lyet" (In One Word: Sixty Years), *Mishpoxe*, vol. 16 (2005): 85–94.

50. "From the Life and Activity of Anton Mitrofanovich Kietsko," manuscript, Kietsko's memoir, N/V 24487, Archives of the Byelorussian State Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War, Minsk, p. 37.

51. Galina Antonovna Kazak and Lydia Antonovna Bashkevich (daughters of Anton Mitrofanovich Kietsko), interview, Minsk, September 19, 2003.

52. Kietsko, "From the Life and Activity of Anton Mitrofanovich Kietsko," p. 37, obverse side of page.

53. Vladimir Stepanovich Baranov, interview, Minsk, December 9, 2006. Baranov was a child in Sparring's orphanage.

54. Galina Antonovna Kazak and Lydia Antonovna Bashkevich (daughters of Anton Mitrofanovich Kietsko), interview, Minsk, September 19, 2003. Galina was born after the war. The third of the Kietsko sisters, Valentina,

stood in the line with Lydia but lives in Vilnius and was not present for this interview.

55. Kietsko gives the total number of children in the orphanages and the number of Jewish children among them in his memoir, “From the Life and Activity of Anton Mitrofanovich Kietsko,” p. 37, obverse side of page. A certificate signed by Sparning, in the possession of Lydia Antonovna Bashkevich, says that there were 70 children, 35 of them Jews, in her orphanage. Rozinsky, *Deti Minskovo Geto* (Children of the Minsk Ghetto) 12, cites a letter from Kruger to a survivor of Sparning’s orphanage, in which Kruger says that he was given an order to inspect the activities of the Evangelical communities, and that he found that in the two orphanages overseen by Anton Kietsko and Yakov Rapietsky there were 126 children, of whom 73 were Jews. He writes that he did not report this to the German authorities. Kietsko also gives a very brief description of how he and the directors of these orphanages protected Jewish children, which coincides with his daughters’ more extensive description.

56. Kietsko was arrested after the war and spent seven years in detention. Raissa Chernoglazova told me that this was due to his having published an article during the war in which he wrote that there was more freedom of religion under Nazi than Soviet rule (interview, Minsk, August 23, 2002). Vladimir Stepanovich Baranov told me that Sparning was also arrested after the war and charged with “evangelizing children” during the war (interview, Minsk, December 9, 2006). But the children from her orphanage wrote a collective letter defending her, and the charges were dropped. In her old age, after the end of Soviet rule, Sparning told Baranov that a German had helped them to save Jewish children during the war. Baranov explained that if this had come to light when Sparning was arrested, she would surely have gone to prison. Thus Sparning kept this a secret until close to the end of her life.

57. Ildiana Lipovich, maiden name Borshova, September 18, 1997, statement, in the possession of Galina Antonovna Kazak.

58. Lydia Alexandrovna Kompaniets-Petrova, statement, in possession of Galina Antonovna Kazak.

59. The following account is based on interviews with Rosa Yefimovna Zelenko, Minsk, July 10, 2000; Lyubov (Lucia) Yefimovna Zuckerman, July 7, 2000; Lyubov Yefimovna Zuckerman and Rosa Yefimovna Zelenko, Minsk, September 14, 2003; and on a written memoir by Olga Dmitrievna Glazebnaya (Simon), in *Na Perekrestkakh Sudeb* (At the Crossroads of Fate) (Minsk: Four Quarters Publishing House, 2001) 26–31.

60. Olga Dmitrievna Glazebna (Simon), *Na Perekrestkakh Sudeb*, 26–27.

61. Rosa Yefimovna Zelenko and Lyubov Yefimovna Zuckerman, interview, Minsk, September 14, 2003.

62. Olga Dmitrievna Glazebna (Simon), *Na Perekrestkakh Sudeb*, 31.

63. Lyubov Yefimovna Zuckerman, interview, Minsk, July 7, 2000.

64. Rosa Yefimovna Zelenko, interview, Minsk, July 10, 2000.

65. Alexei Vasilivich Chernenko, memoir, January 1945, NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 659.



## CHAPTER 6. GOING TO THE PARTISANS

1. Mikhail Treister and Mikhail Mikhailovich Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, September 17, 2003. Mikhail Treister, interview, Minsk, September 20, 2003. Both Treister and Kantorovich described the attitudes of Byelorussian peasants, in the areas where they served as partisans, toward the Soviets and the Germans. Treister, in my separate interview with him, explained the difference between Ukrainian peasants' bitter hostility toward the Soviets and the much milder attitudes among the Byelorussian peasantry by pointing out that the vast majority of Byelorussian peasants were extremely poor: there was no counterpart in Byelorussia to the Ukrainian class of kulaks, which Soviet collectivization aimed to destroy.

2. Hersh Smolar, transcript of interview, April 1972, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 61.

3. Hersh Smolar, "Population of the Minsk Ghetto in the Struggle against the German Invaders," manuscript, pp. 16–17.

4. Hersh Smolar, transcript of interview, April 1972, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, p. 41.

5. This account of the three groups that left the ghetto for Sergeev's unit in December 1941 is based on Evsei Lvovich Shnitman, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, pp. 140/220–143/223; Nechama Ruditzer, memoir, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1196, p. 48; Fyodor Davidovich Shedletsky, memoir, Yad Vashem Archives, M41/49; Chanah Rubenchik, memoir, fond 4, opis 33a, delo 659, pp. 35–36; and Hersh Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989) 63–64. Also Chanah Rubenchik, interview, Minsk, July 17, 2000.

6. The planned uprising of prisoners of war in Minsk is described in German intelligence reports in the German Federal Archives (the Bundesarchiv, or BArch). Report no. 9, for the period January 1–31, 1942, states that a task force of the Security Police and the SD had discovered plans for simultaneous armed revolts on the part of prisoners of war among prisoners of war in military hospital #1, in the hospitals for prisoners of war #2 and #3, in the prisoner-of-war camp, and in the camp of prisoners of war in the Voroshilov factory, to take place on January 4, 1942, and that according to the plan, groups of partisans would approach Minsk, and Bolshevik (i.e., Soviet) paratroopers would land at the Minsk airport. BArch R 70 SU 31, pp. 149–50. A report dated March 1942 noted: "It was reported that, on the basis of arrests made thus far, it has been learned that there was an underground organization with 60 members in the ghetto, that the partisans were being sent money and arms from the ghetto, and that some 60–80 Jews had been sent from the ghetto to the partisans." BArch R 70 SU 31, for the period March 1–31, 1942, p. 198.

7. Anatoli Rubin, *Magafayim Xumim, Magafayim Adumim: Me'Geto Minsk ad Maxanot Sibir* (Brown Boots, Red Boots: From the Minsk Ghetto to the Camps of Siberia) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1977) 17.

8. BArch R 58/221, p. 219. This report also noted that the head of the Minsk underground (Kazinetz) was a Jew. A more extensive report, sent to Berlin on May 29, 1942, and based on information from the late March/early April mass arrests



of underground members, reported: “It is noteworthy that the chiefs of departments and Military Council leaders had a negative attitude to Jewish partisans, because they were cowards and could not be used extensively. The major cause of the Jews’ interest in the partisan movement was their desire to get out of the ghetto; then they avoided any further activity and went their own way. So the Military Council gave Jewish partisans false orders and wrong routes to the partisans, and thus these groups wandered about aimlessly. Some groups were captured by German soldiers.” NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 944, pp. 257–59, internal p. 4.

9. Report from the Occupied Eastern Territories, Chief of Security Police and SD, General Headquarters, Report to Berlin, May 8, 1942, and BArch R 58/697, pp. 21 and 23.

10. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 80–81.

11. Liond described Alshan as a town of less than 1,000 people, situated between Minsk and Vilna (transcript of interview, in Yiddish, August 7, 1968, conducted by David Cohen, under the auspices of the Oral History Project, Hebrew University). There is no longer a town by this name on the map.

12. This account is based on Reuven Liond’s published memoir, *Partizan Yehudi ba’Ya’ar* (A Jewish Partisan in the Forest) (Tel Aviv: Sifrut Poalim, 1993) 45–69.

13. Abram Ilich Rosovsky, interviews, Minsk, October 8, 1999, and September 11, 2003.

14. Sonya Kurlandskaya was a member of the ghetto desyatka headed by Yenta (Lena) Maizles. Anna Kupreyeva, “Information about the Activity of the Underground Party Organization of the Minsk Ghetto,” NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 1197, p. 47. Kurlandskaya’s full name was Sophia Davidovna Kurlandskaya. Her date of birth is not known; she died in 1943. *MAP*, p. 161.

15. Comrade Demyentyev, memoir, NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307.

16. Hersh Smolar (*Minsk Ghetto*, 120) describes two wagons full of Jews from the Shirokaya camp who arrived at Zorin’s base with thirty rifles seized during the breakout; Zyamke Gurvich carried out this operation, with the help of Sonya Kurlandskaya.

17. N. L. Feldman, memoir, NARB fond 750, opis 1, delo 307, pp. 223–24. Tanya Lipshitz’s underground name was Natasha Matskevich, and this is the name that Feldman uses for her in his memoir. She moved to Israel and married and now uses the name Tanya Boyko.

18. Hinda Tassman, “By One’s Efforts, One Survives!” memoir [in Hebrew], in *Minsk Ir ve’Em*, vol. 2, ed. Shlomo Even-Shoshan (Israel: Irgun Yotsei Minsk, Beit Loxamei ha-Getaot, 1985) 383.

19. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 117–19. Ya’akov Grinstein, “Umkum un Vidershtand af Vaysrusisher Erd, 1941–45,” manuscript in Yiddish, Yad Vashem Archives, 033/465, pp. 74–76.

20. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 123.

21. Smolar, *Minsk Ghetto*, 120, 122.

22. Moshe Kaganovich, *Di Milkhome fun Yidishe Partizaner in Mizrah Eyrope* (The War of Jewish Partisans in Eastern Europe) (Buenos Aires: Tzentralfarband fun Poilishe Yidn in Argentine [The Central Union of Polish Jews in Argentina], 1956) 1: 250.

23. Tassman, “By One’s Efforts, One Survives!” [in Hebrew] 384.
24. The statistics on Zorin’s Brigade are documented in NARB fond 3500, opis 5, delo 402, 462. Also see Abrasha Slukhovsky, *Fun Geto in di Velder* (Paris: Farlag Oyfsnai, 1975) 134–37; and Grinstein, “Umkum un Vidershtand,” 74–77.
25. Rivka Rubenchik, transcript of interview, in Yiddish, August 29, 1968, Oral History Project, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, tape 1401.
26. This account is based on interviews, published memoirs, and transcripts of interviews. Interviews: Yocheved Rubenchik (Iberman) and Abram Rubenchik, interview, Petah Tikvah, Israel, August 23, 2000; Yeva Perevozskina, interview, Be’ersheva, Israel, November 20, 2000; Hinda Tassman (Nechamchik), interview, Bat Yam, Israel, November 13, 2000. Published memoirs: Yocheved Iberman-Rubenchik, “Lo l’Shem Itur G’vura” (Not for the Sake of a Medal of Honor), and Hinda Tassman, “Ba’Damayich Chai!” (By One’s Own Efforts, One Survives!), in *Minsk Ir ve’Em*, vol. 2, 371–77 and 378–86. Transcripts of interviews, in Yiddish, conducted by David Cohen, under the auspices of the Oral History Project, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University: Rivka Rubenchik, August 29, 1968, tape 1401; Yocheved Iberman-Rubenchik, August 29, 1968, tape 1402; Hinda Tassman, October 15, 1968, tape 1230.
27. Abram Rubenchik, *Pravda o Minskom Geto* (The Truth about the Minsk Ghetto) (Tel Aviv: Krugozor [Prospect], 1999).
28. Abram Rubenchik, interview, Petah Tikvah, Israel, August 23, 2000.
29. Tanya Lifshitz Boyko, interview, Bat Yam, November 10, 2000. Tanya Lifshitz was given a document by the underground in the name of Tatiana Matskevich. In documents of the underground she is sometimes referred to as Tatiana Matskevich rather than Tanya Lifshitz. Her underground pseudonym was Natasha.
30. Sima Fiterson Vodinskaya, interview, Petah Tikvah, November 8, 2000.
31. Berta Gendelevich, interview, Minsk, October 6, 1999.
32. Mikhail Timofeevich Novodorsky, interview, Minsk, October 7, 1999. Novodorsky was named Meir Tevelovich at birth and took the name Mikhail Timofeevich in an orphanage that he lived in after the liberation of Minsk.
33. Gendel Solomonov, interview, Minsk, August 1, 2000.
34. Maya Levina Krapina, interview, Minsk, October 4, 1999.
35. A film was made about this story: *Die Judin and der Hauptmann: Die Geschichte der Ilse Stein*, by Ulf von Mechow, Germany, 1994.
36. Leah (Liza) Zalmonovna Gutkovich, interview, Minsk, July 6, 2000. Ya’akov Grinstein confirmed this story and the role of the ghetto underground in it in an interview on November 12, 2000, Givatayim, Israel. In “Umkum un Vidershtand,” 11–14, Grinstein relates the story of Ilse Schultz and the trip to the partisans. He writes that Schultz at first treated Jews badly, but that after falling in love with Ilse his behavior changed dramatically. Anna Krasnopyorka worked in Schultz’s brigade and observed his relationships with Ilse and Liza (she uses the names Otto Schmidt, Edith, and Linda, but her account clearly refers to Schultz, Ilse, and Liza). She described him as a decent and courageous man who treated the Jews in his brigade respectfully and on several occasions saved Jews from death at the hands of the Germans. She recounted one instance in which Schultz sent a woman, a member of his brigade, on an errand; she was stopped by a policeman who did not believe that she had been authorized to leave her

work brigade, and who threatened her with arrest. Schultz, when told of this, slapped the policeman in the face and ordered him to apologize to the woman for having doubted her word. To the amazement of Anna and other Jews present, the policeman apologized. Anna Krasnopyorka left the ghetto before Liza, Ilse, and Schultz. Anna Krasnopërko, *Briefe meiner Erinnerung; Mein Überleben in jüdischen Ghetto von Minsk 1941–42* (Letters of My Memory: My Survival in the Jewish Ghetto of Minsk 1941–42) (Villigst, Germany: Haus Villigst, 1991) 59. A report on the Minsk ghetto by ghetto underground member Anna Machis, written during the war in a partisan village, describes Schultz's trip to the partisans and reports that he took 37 Jews with him. NARB fond 4, opis 33a, delo 656, pp. 201, 202 (23–24).

#### CHAPTER 7. THE SOVIET BETRAYAL OF THE MINSK UNDERGROUND

1. Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, interview, Minsk, December 12, 2000. Baranovsky is Research Director of the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus and was a member of the 1959 commission that wrote the report on the basis of which the Minsk underground was rehabilitated. As a member of this commission, Baranovsky said, he had seen 126 files of people connected with the Minsk underground and arrested after the war.

2. Zinaida Alexeevna Nikodemova, interview, Minsk, August 1, 2000. Zinaida Alexeevna told me that in the area of northern Byelorussia, near Vitebsk, where her mother was born, Pruslin was a common Jewish name. Pruslina was capable of prudence as well as courage. Zinaida Alexeevna remembered that she once took a walk with her mother and Kozlov, who boasted about his recently published history of the partisan movement and described its contents. Ten-year-old Zinaida responded, dismissively, "But your book is just a bunch of speeches." Her mother poked her elbow sharply into Zinaida's side, and the girl understood that she was not to make any more such comments.

3. Elena Gapova, personal conversation, Minsk, July 2000.

4. Chasya Mendeleeвна Pruslina, "On the History of the Rehabilitation of the Minsk Communist Underground (1941–2)," manuscript, in Pruslina's papers, held by her daughter, Zinaida Alexeevna Nicodemovna; copy in my possession, p. 1. Henceforth, Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation."

5. Chasya Pruslina, statement, August 25, 1944, Committee on the Creation of the Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War, handwritten manuscript, in Pruslina's papers, p. 8.

6. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 6.

7. Raissa Grigorievna Khasenvevich, interview, Minsk, October 13, 1999; and Mikhail Mikhailovich Kantorovich, interview, Minsk, October 9, 1999.

8. NARB fond 4085, opis 1, delo 1, pp. 21–22.

9. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 7.

10. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 9–10.

11. Nina Odintsova, personal file, NARB fond 4, opis 33a, svaska 81, delo 615.

12. File on Nikolai Mikhailovich Nikitin, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus. Chasya Pruslina mentions Nikitin's death at Magadan in "History

of the Rehabilitation,” 6. Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director of the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus, told me that Nikitin died when his daughter went to the camp to tell him that he had been exonerated. Interview, Minsk, September 12, 2000.

13. File on Vasili Ivanovich Saychik, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus, transmitted to me by I. Yerin of the KGB, Minsk.

14. File on Leonid Semyonovich Baranovsky, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus.

15. File on Aaron Gertsovich Fiterson, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus.

16. File on Varvara Vladimirovna Plavinskaya, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus.

17. Files on Pyotr Timofeevich Skomorokhov and Maria Alexandrovna Skomorokhova, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus.

18. Files on Irma Ivanona Leyzer and Evgenia Vikentyevna Lyagushevich, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus.

19. Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky (Research Director of the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus), interview, Minsk, September 15, 2003.

20. Bronya Goffman, interview, Minsk, September 30, 1999.

21. Anastasia Fominichna Veremeichik gives an account of these events in her memoir (NARB fond 750, opis 1, dela 3–7, pp. 66–68) that differs slightly from Gvozdyev’s. I rely on Gvozdyev’s account rather than on Veremeichik’s because his is firsthand, but hers is worth noting. Veremeichik writes that Volkov introduced Gvozdyev to Rogov, not knowing that Rogov had become a traitor. Gvozdyev then disappeared. Later Volkov met Rogov on the street, asked him about Gvozdyev’s whereabouts, and was arrested. According to Veremeichik’s account Volkov and Gvozdyev were then both beaten by the Gestapo, Gvozdyev escaped, went to the forest, and then went to Moscow and was punished. Volkov, she writes, was murdered in prison.

22. My account is based on a letter from Alexander Matveevich Gvozdyev, Captain of State Security under the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, to the Secretary of the Minsk City Communist Party, to the Commission on the Minsk Underground, 1959. Vladimir Borisovich Karpov, archival materials, fond 305, opis 1, delo 309, Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Minsk.

23. The Soviet authorities were not in touch with the Minsk City Committee, but there were underground groups in Minsk that had had contact with the KGB. It is possible that Gvozdyev was given names through this route.

24. Gvozdyev’s file was not among those that the KGB provided to me. Since he was a Captain of State Security under the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, his file is no doubt held elsewhere. It is probably unobtainable.

25. A. L. Kotikov was arrested by the Soviets after the war for having turned informer during the war, after his arrest by the Germans. On April 9, 1946, Kotikov was interrogated and confessed to having given the Germans the names of many underground members, and having aided the Germans in arrests by pointing out underground members. Kotikov listed Gebelev as one of those whose names he had given the Germans. This seems questionable, because, as

Kotikov knew, Gebelev had already been killed by this time. It is difficult to know whether Kotikov's confession was accurate or if it was forced. Kotikov's confession is quoted in T. Gorbunov, N. Mishkov, S. Pochanin, I. Kravchineko, P. Lupilo, A. Kuznaev, V. Davidova, and V. Romanovsky, "On the Question of the Party Underground in the City of Minsk, During the Years of the Great Patriotic War, June 1941–July 1942," p. 53. This is an unpublished document, written under the auspices of the Institute of History of the Communist Party of Byelorussia. It was provided to me by Evgeni Ivanovich Baranovsky, Research Director of the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus. This unpublished document was the basis for the article "About the Party Underground in Minsk during the Great Patriotic War, June 1941–July 1944," *The Byelorussian Communist*, no. 6 (June 1960): 70–99 (published in Minsk by the Publishing House of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, Zvyazda). Excerpts of this article appeared in *Sovietskaya Byelorussia*, July 5, 1960, pp. 2–3.

26. Gorbunov et al., "On the Question of the Party Underground," 53.

27. Kotikov's report to Ponomarenko is reprinted in Gorbunov et al., "On the Question of the Party Underground," 53–55.

28. Report to Ponomarenko by Vladimir Kozachyonok, December 25, 1942, NARB fond 3, opis 33a, 86, delo 6546, pp. 336–38. Noted on the document, in handwriting: "to be put in Minsk case."

29. Pruslina gives the figure 170,000 in "History of the Rehabilitation," 5.

30. "On the Question of the Party Underground in Minsk during the Great Patriotic War," 3–4.

31. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 4.

32. Letter from Ponomarenko to Abakumov, Deputy of NARKOM (People's Commissar for Internal Affairs) of the NKVD, December 4, 1942, quoted in T. Gorbunov, "On the Question of the Party Underground," September 7, 1959, NARB fond 4, opis 81, delo 1433, p. 17.

33. File on Vasili Ivanovich Saychik, Central KGB Archive of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk.

34. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 18.

35. Minutes of the Meeting of the Former Participants in the Communist Underground in Minsk during the German Fascist Occupation, Minsk, December 1954–January 1955. Written memoirs of former Minsk underground members appended. A. K. Yanulis, NARB fond 4683, opis 3, delo 830, p. 200.

36. Letter from V. I. Kozlov and I. A. Bielsky to N. E. Akhimovich, quoted in Gorbunov et al., "On the Question of the Party Underground," 96–97 (no citation is given). A note on the letter, signed by Akhimovich, reads: "Sent to the CC CPB. September 26, 1943." On the same day Kozlov and Akhimovich sent a radiogram to Ponomarenko that said the same thing and asked for the approval of Leschenya as secretary.

37. Minutes of the Sixth Session of the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR, Gosizdat BSSR, 1946, p. 29, cited in Gorbunov et al., "On the Question of the Party Underground," 91–92.

38. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 15–16.

39. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 27.

40. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 10.
41. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 11.
42. Letter to N. S. Khrushchev from members of the Minsk underground, July 3, 1956, in Pruslina's papers.
43. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 11.
44. Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 12.
45. T. Gorbunov, "On the Activities of the Communist Underground in Minsk during the Years of the Great Patriotic War," report, pp. 29–46, Protocol 178/a, Resolution of the Central Committee of CPB, September 7, 1959, NARB fond 4, opis 81, delo 1433. On Kozlov's reversal of the decision, and the overturning of this reversal: Pruslina, "History of the Rehabilitation," 12–13.
46. "About the Party Underground in Minsk during the Great Patriotic War, June 1941–July 1944," *The Byelorussian Communist*, no. 6 (June 1960): 70–99 (published in Minsk by the Publishing House of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, Zvyazda). This article relied upon the account given in the unpublished report by T. Gorbunov et al., "On the Question of the Party Underground in the City of Minsk, During the Years of the Great Patriotic War, June 1941–July 1942." Excerpts of this article in *The Byelorussian Communist* appeared in *Sovetskaya Byelorussia*, July 5, 1960, pp. 2–3.

## CHAPTER 8. STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

### ELSEWHERE: THE KOVNO GHETTO

Kovno and Kaunas are the Polish and Lithuanian names, respectively, for the same city. I have used "Kovno" in this chapter because most Jews continued to use this term (or its Yiddish equivalent, Kovne) before and during the war. But since the city was called Kaunas during the period of Soviet rule, Jewish Communists often used that term. In the literature on the ghetto, non-Communist Jews generally used the term Kovno (or Kovne), and Jewish Communists generally used the term Kaunas.

1. In a postwar interview Hersh Smolar said that he and others in the Minsk ghetto underground had no information about conditions in other ghettos or about ghetto underground organizations until, in the forest, they heard a rumor about the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Hersh Smolar, transcript of interview, April 1972, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/3605, pp. 62–63.
2. On the establishment of the Kovno ghetto, and conditions in it, see Yosef Gar, *Umkum fun der Yidisher Kovne* (The Death of Jewish Kovno) (Munich: Union of Lithuanian Jews in the American Zone of Germany, 1948) 44–59.
3. On the Zionist underground in the ghetto, see Zvi Brown and Dov Levin, *Toldoteha shel Maxteret: Ha'Irgun ha'Loxem shel Yehudei Kovno be'Milxemet ha'Olam ha'Sheniya* (History of the Underground: The Fighting Organization of the Jews of Kovno during the Second World War) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1962) 70–108; and Gar, *Umkum fun der Yidisher Kovne*, 397–400.
4. Meir Yelin and Dmitri Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto* (Partisans of the Kaunas Ghetto) (Moscow: Der Emes, 1948) 31.
5. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 32.
6. Sabotage in the ghetto is described in Brown and Levin, *Toldoteha shel Maxteret*, 114, and Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 39–41.

7. Alex (Alter) Feitelson, *In Shturem un Gerangl* (In Storm and Struggle) (Vilna: Lituanus Press, 1993) 297.

8. The connections between the Anti-Fascist Organization, the Eltstenrat, and the Jewish Police are described in Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 59–60.

9. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 68–69.

10. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 70–71.

11. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 73.

12. Nehemiah Endlin, “Derhoibene Gvure” (Elevated Heroism), in *Chaim Yelin, Geto Shreiber un Kemfer* (Chaim Yelin, Ghetto Writer and Fighter) (Tel Aviv: Igud Yotsei Litah be’Yisrael [Association of Lithuanian Immigrants to Israel], 1975) 44.

13. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 75–77.

14. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 79–80.

15. Brown and Levin, *Toldoteha shel Maxteret*, 80–83.

16. Brown and Levin quote somewhat differing accounts of the joint structure that linked the Anti-Fascist Organization with Matzok. According to one version, two bodies were created: a *va’ad tzibur*, or public committee, which held the highest authority within the underground and determined general policy, and a coordinating committee, which planned and carried out the decisions of the public committee. Brown and Levin, *Toldoteha shel Maxteret*, 117–18.

17. Brown and Levin, *Toldoteha shel Maxteret*, 132.

18. Quoted in Brown and Levin, *Toldoteha shel Maxteret*, 135. They cite the testimony of Moshe Levin in *The Jewish Partisan War in Eastern Europe* (Tel Aviv: Ayinot) 87.

19. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 82–83.

20. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 88–89.

21. Sarah Ginaite, interview, Toronto, June 6, 1999.

22. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 90. The phrase used as a password was “*Sher un aizen, undzer folk, amkho*,” which combined the Yiddish “scissors and iron” of the tailors with the Hebrew-derived “*amkho*,” roughly meaning “the (Jewish) common people,” widely used as a code word for Jews during the German occupation.

23. Yelin and Gelpert, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser Geto*, 88–91.

24. Gar, *Umkum fun der Yidisher Kovne*, 204–6.

25. Gar, *Umkum fun der Yidisher Kovne*, 226–28.

# Guide to Names

The following individuals figure prominently in this book's discussion of the Minsk ghetto. (Individuals mentioned in the discussion of ghettos outside Minsk are not listed below.)

ROSA ALTMAN: a member of the ghetto underground, secretary to the collaborator NAHUM EPSTEIN; head of the Labor Exchange after HERSH RUDITZER's arrest.

TZYPA BOTVINIK-LUPIAN: a member of the ghetto underground who, along with EKATERINA TZIRLINA, and with the help of AARON FITERSON, smuggled weapons parts into the ghetto from a German arms factory outside the ghetto, where she was employed.

CAPTAIN BYSTROV (SERGEEV): head of a partisan unit that established contact with an underground group in the ghetto, and accepted many Jews.

BORIS CHAIMOVICH: a survivor of the Drozdy camp who joined NECHAMA RUDITZER's underground group in the ghetto, helped lead it, and later became a partisan leader.

ALEXEI VASILIEVICH CHERNENKO: a young Byelorussian Communist who participated in an underground group in Minsk whose members sheltered many Jews during pogroms in the ghetto and sent many of them to the partisans.

MISHA (MIKHAIL) CHIPCHIN: a member of the ghetto underground who ran the underground printing press after it was moved outside the ghetto.

BORIS DOLSKY: a member of the Minsk Judenrat, in charge of the Housing Department.

NAHUM EPSTEIN: a collaborator on the Minsk Judenrat, in charge of the Labor Exchange.



NAHUM FELDMAN: a leader of the ghetto underground who became a partisan leader.

AARON GERTSOVICH FITERSON: a member of the ghetto underground who served, as an underground member, in the Jewish Police.

SIMA FITERSON (VODINSKAYA): a ghetto child who became a partisan liaison and led many groups of ghetto Jews to the forest.

SEMYON GANZENKO: a prisoner of war rescued from the Shirokaya Street camp by the ghetto underground and taken to the forest, where he became a partisan leader and supported the creation of a Jewish family camp in which hundreds from the Minsk ghetto survived the war.

MISHA (MIKHAIL) GEBELEV: a leader of the ghetto underground and liaison to the city underground; arrested in the summer of 1942, he died in prison.

NAZARI YEVSTRATOVICH GERASIMIENKO: a leader of the city underground who maintained contact with the ghetto underground.

TATIANA DANILOVNA GERASIMIENKO: Nazari's wife; she helped rescue Jewish children from the ghetto.

BRONYA GOFFMAN: a young woman from the ghetto who obtained a job in the city where she helped to set the type for underground publications, including the first issue of *Zvezda*, the underground newspaper.

SARAH GOLAND: a member of the ghetto underground who organized many groups that left the ghetto for the forest.

MARIA SERGEYEVNA GOROKHOVA: a member of the city underground who hid HERSH SMOLAR when he left the ghetto, and helped convey messages from him to the ghetto.

YA'AKOV AND BELLA GRINSTEIN: Jews from west of Minsk who were brought to the Minsk ghetto, where they joined the underground with the help of SARAH GOLAND.

LEAH (LIZA) ZALMANOVNA GUTKOVICH: a young Jewish woman who helped arrange the escape from the ghetto of twenty-five Jews, including herself and her friend ILSE STEIN, taken to the forest by German officer WILLI SCHULTZ.

IVAN KABUSHKIN (UNDERGROUND PSEUDONYM ZHAN): a leader of the Minsk underground who was arrested and imprisoned; MIRA RUDERMAN conveyed messages between him and the underground

MIKHAIL MIKHAILOVICH KANTOROVICH: a Jewish teenager who organized an underground group in the ghetto that was connected to the Markevich Group, a secondary underground organization in Minsk.

FANYA KAPLAN: YOCHEVED RUBENCHIK's friend, who went with her to the partisans.

ISAI KAZINIETZ (UNDERGROUND PSEUDONYMS SLAVEK, POBEDIT): first head of the Minsk underground, arrested in September 1942.

RAISSA GRIGORIEVNA KHASENYEVICH: a young Jewish woman who became a member of the city underground while living in the ghetto and, with the help of her many Byelorussian friends, was able to do work for the underground while circulating between the ghetto and the city.

ANTON MITROFANOVICH KIETSKO: an Evangelical Christian presbyter who oversaw Minsk orphanages #2 and #7 and helped the directors of those orphanages protect many Jewish children.

DAVID KISSEL: a member of the ghetto underground who succeeded HERSH SMOLAR as its head.

ESFIR KISSEL: DAVID KISSEL's wife; she obtained a job in the city and helped convey messages from HERSH SMOLAR, in hiding in the city, and her husband, in the ghetto.

FRIEDA KISSEL: DAVID AND ESFIR KISSEL's daughter; she survived the war with a series of caretakers, and in an orphanage, in the city.

TANYA AND FRIEDA KNIGOVY: sisters in the ghetto who, with MIRA RUDERMAN's help, took messages to and from IVAN KABUSHKIN, the imprisoned underground leader.

IVAN KOVALYOV: the second head of the Minsk underground; he was arrested in September 1942; many believe that he then became an informer.

V. I. KOZLOV: a Soviet leader who during and after the war supported P. K. PONOMARENKO's view of the Minsk underground as a German operation.

DANIL YEVGENEVICH KUDRIAKOV: an escaped prisoner of war, hiding in Minsk, who assisted the ghetto underground.

DR. LEIB KULIK: the director of the Jewish Hospital; he worked closely with the ghetto underground and was considered one of its members.

SONYA KURLANDSKAYA: a member of the ghetto underground who was assistant to the head of the Shirokaya Street camp and arranged for many escapes from the camp.

S. N. LESCHENYA: a Soviet leader who during and after the war supported P. K. PONOMARENKO's view of the Minsk underground as a German operation.

MAYA LEVINA (KRAPINA): one of forty children who left the ghetto, walked to the town of Porechya, in partisan territory, and were placed in peasant homes by the partisans.

SARAH LEVINA: a member of the ghetto underground who became one of its leaders as others left for the forest.

TATIANA (TANYA) LIFSHITZ (BOYKO): a young Jewish woman who left the ghetto and became a liaison between the partisans and the ghetto.

REUVEN LIOND: a young Jew from a town in eastern Poland who fled to Minsk, lived in the ghetto, and became involved in underground work.

ROSA EFROIMOVNA LIPSKAYA: leader of an underground group in the ghetto whose members smuggled weapons parts into the ghetto.

NINA LISS: a member of the ghetto underground who left the ghetto in search of safe places where Jews could be sent; she was killed after her return to the ghetto.

FRIEDA VULFOVNA LOSIK (REYZMAN): a child in the ghetto, the daughter of an underground member.

LENA (ELENA, YENTA) MAIZLES: a member of one of the first underground groups in the ghetto; she became the leader of another underground group.

ALEXANDER MARKEVICH: the head of a second underground organization in Minsk, which like the main Minsk underground included Jews as well as Byelorussians.

ILYA (ELYE) MUSHKIN: the first head of the Minsk Judenrat.

HINDA NECHAMCHIK (TASSMAN): a child in the ghetto who became a liaison between the partisans and the ghetto; she led many Jews out of the ghetto to the forest.

NIKOLAI MIKHAILOVICH NIKITIN (BORN SHTEINGART): a Jewish member of the underground's Military Council who became the head of a partisan unit and was later arrested by the Soviets.

VASILI SEMYONOVICH ORLOV: a Minsk city official who arranged for Jewish children to be hidden in Minsk orphanages during the war.

IVAN ANDREYEVICH PODOPRIGORA (PSEUDONYM FOR CAPTAIN NIKOLAI IVANOVICH IVANOV): a prisoner of war who worked in a German-run printing house in Minsk, established contact with coworkers belonging to the ghetto underground, and helped establish an underground printing press.

P. K. PONOMARENKO: Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party and, during the war, Chief of Staff of the Byelorussian Partisan Movement; he denounced the Minsk underground as a German operation.

MOTYE (MEIR, MATVEI) MENDELEVICH PRUSLIN: CHASYA PRUSLINA's brother and a leader of the ghetto underground until he went to the partisans.

CHASYA MENDELEEVNA PRUSLINA: a leader of the ghetto underground who traveled to the Lyuban swamps, south of Minsk, to establish contact between the Minsk underground and the Byelorussian Communist Party; after the war she defended the legitimacy of the Minsk underground.

BORIS PUPKO: a Jew employed outside the ghetto as a typesetter; with BRONYA GOFFMAN's help he set the type for underground publications, including the first issue of *Zvezda*.

EMMA RADOVA: a member of the ghetto underground; its main internal liaison; she was arrested and died in prison, under torture, without revealing any information.

LOLA (ELENA, LILYA) REVINSKAYA: a member of the city underground, and partner of ISAI KAZINIETZ; she helped rescue Jewish children from the ghetto.

CHAIM ROSENBLATT: a collaborator on the Judenrat and head of the Special Operations Group, which came to dominate the Jewish police.

ABRAM ILICH ROSOVSKY: a teenager who with other young people fled the ghetto and joined the partisans.

ABRAM RUBENCHIK: younger brother of YOCHEVED RUBENCHIK; he left the ghetto for the partisans in a group that she led.

YOCHEVED RUBENCHIK (IBERMAN): a teenager in the ghetto who fled the ghetto, became a much-admired partisan fighter, and returned to the ghetto to lead groups to the forest.

ANATOLI RUBIN: a teenager who left the ghetto and survived the war living with a peasant family.

MIRA MATVEEVNA RUDERMAN: a teenager who worked with the city underground to convey messages to and from the imprisoned underground leader IVAN KABUSHKIN.

HERSH RUDITZER: a member of the Minsk Judenrat and head of the Labor Exchange.

MISHA (MIKHAIL) RUDITZER: a Jewish teenager who remained outside the ghetto and served as a liaison between ghetto and city underground groups and CAPTAIN BYSTROV's partisan unit.

NECHAMA (NADYA) RUDITZER: MISHA RUDITZER's sister; with her husband, she organized an underground group in the ghetto.

BORIS RUDZIANKO: a prisoner of war, rescued by OLGA SHERBATSEVICH and captured by the Germans on his way to the partisans; he became an informer.

VASILY IVANOVICH SAYCHIK: a member of the city underground who helped establish an underground press.

WILLI SCHULTZ: a German officer who fell in love with a German Jewish woman in the ghetto, Ilse Stein, and took her among twenty-five Jews to the partisans.

ZYAMA SEREBRIANSKY: a member of the Minsk Judenrat, in charge of the Jewish police.

FEDYA (FYODOR) SHEDLETZKY: a Jewish teenager who remained outside the ghetto and became a liaison between ghetto and city underground groups and CAPTAIN BYSTROV's partisan unit.

OLGA FEDOROVNA SHERBATSEVICH: a member of the city underground who helped many prisoners of war escape and reach the partisans.

NATASHA SHUNEIKO: a Byelorussian woman who told YOCHEVED RUBENCHIK, a Jewish coworker in a German factory, how to reach partisan territory.

TAMARA SERGEEVNA SINITZA: the leader of an underground group in the city in whose work RAISSA KHASENYEVICH took part.

HERSH SMOLAR (ALTERNATE SPELLING SMOLIAR): a leader of the ghetto underground who survived the war and later published two accounts of the ghetto and its underground movement.

VERA LEONARDOVNA SPARNING: the director of Minsk Orphanage #7. With the help of presbyter ANTON MITROFANOVICH KIETSKO, the overseer of the orphanage, she helped many Jewish children survive the war.

ILSE STEIN: a German Jewish woman who fell in love with a German officer, Willi Schultz, and was taken to the forest by him, along with her friend Leah Zelmanovna Gutkovich and a group of Jews from the ghetto.

MIRA STRONGINA: a member of the ghetto underground, secretary to NAHUM EPSTEIN, the collaborator who headed the Labor Exchange after HERSH RUDITZER's arrest.

- GLAFIRA VASILIEVNA SUSLOVA: a Byelorussian woman who assisted the city and ghetto underground organizations in establishing an underground press.
- DAVID TAUBKIN: a Jewish child who escaped the ghetto and survived the war in Minsk Orphanage #7, directed by VERA LEONARDOVNA SPARNING, and overseen by ANTON MITROFANOVICH KIETSKO.
- MIKHAIL TREISTER: a Jewish teenager who escaped from the Shirokaya Street camp, returned to the ghetto, and led a group of Jews to the partisans.
- EKATERINA ISRAELOVNA TZIRLINA: a ghetto underground member who, along with TZYPA BOTVINIK-LUPIAN, and with the help of AARON FITERSON, smuggled weapons parts into the ghetto.
- MIKHAIL MIKHAILOVICH VORONOV, AND HIS FATHER, MIKHAIL PETROVICH: members of the city underground who printed underground materials, some of them typeset by BORIS PUPKO, with the help of BRONYA GOFFMAN.
- ELENA VORONOVA: MIKHAIL MIKHAILOVICH VORONOV's wife, who helped rescue children from the ghetto.
- ALEXANDRA KONSTANTINOVNA (SHURA) YANULIS: a member of the city underground who, with the help of MIRA RUDERMAN, established contact with the imprisoned underground leader IVAN KABUSHKIN.
- MANYA YESINSKAYA: a Byelorussian woman who helped many Jews in the ghetto, including members of the ghetto underground.
- ANNA ANDREEVNA YEZUBCHIK: a member of the city underground who accompanied CHASYA PRUSLINA to the base of the Byelorussian Communist Party in the Lyuban swamps, south of Minsk.
- MOISHE YOFFE: the second head of the Minsk Judenrat. His son, Zelig, immigrated to Israel after the war and changed his name to Yafo, and was interviewed under that name about the Minsk ghetto.
- ZHENKA (PSEUDONYM FOR DAVID GERTSIK): a Jewish teenager who remained outside the ghetto and served as a liaison between the ghetto and city underground organizations.
- SHOLEM (SHIMON) ZORIN: a Minsk Jew who became a partisan leader and organized "Zorin's Brigade," a family camp in which hundreds of Minsk Jews survived the war.
- LYUBOV (LUCIA) YEFIMOVNA ZUCKERMAN: a member of a prewar friendship circle, whose members inside and outside the ghetto helped each other during the war.
- ROSA YEFIMOVNA ZUCKERMAN (ZELENKO): LYUBOV ZUCKERMAN's sister, a member of the same friendship circle.

# Sources

I list my major sources below. In addition to these I used numerous documents from the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus that are less easily categorized than survivors' memoirs, material contained in the archival materials of Vladimir Borisovich Karpov in the Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, documents contained in Chasya Pruslina's papers, German documents on the Minsk ghetto from the German Federal Archives (Das Bundesarchiv), the archives of Yad Vashem, the transcripts of interviews conducted by and held in the archives of the Oral History Project of the Institute on Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and photographs from the National Archive of Film, Photo, and Phono Documents in Dzherzhinsk, Belarus.

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### *In Minsk*

#### *Ghetto Survivors*

Alperovich, Dora

Aslyoseva, Frieda Davidovna

Astrometskaya, Fania Yefimovna

Dolgin, Vladimir Semionovich

Dorsky, Grigori Anatolovich

Ellentuch, Israel

Gendelevich, Berta

Gerasimova, Rosa Abramovna (born Yulevich)

Goffman, Bronya

Goldberg, Evgeni

Gutkovich, Leah (Liza) Zalmanovna  
 Hosid, Grigori (Tzvi, Grisha)  
 Kantor, Ester  
 Kantor, Hirsh Mendelevich  
 Kantorovich, Mikhail Mikhailovich  
 Kaplan, Ura Yakovlevich  
 Khasenyevich, Raissa Grigorievna (born Riva Sherman)  
 Kissel, Esfir  
 Krakova, Maria Khanovna  
 Krapina, Maya (Levina)  
 Kraviets, Lev Abromovich  
 Mogilnitzky, Ya'akov Ruvenovich  
 Nikodemova, Zinaida Alexeevna  
 Novodorsky, Mikhail (Meir) Timofeevich  
 Reyzman, Frieda Vulfovna (Losik)  
 Rosovsky, Abram Ilich  
 Rubenchik, Chanah  
 Ruderman, Mira  
 Smernova, Vera  
 Solomonov, Gendel  
 Svirnovskaya, Fira Borisovna  
 Treister, Mikhail  
 Zaleskaya, Sonia (Partnova)  
 Zuckerman, Lyubov (Lucia) Yefimovna  
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Bashkevich, Lydia Antonovna  
 Glazievna, Olga (Simon)  
 Kazak, Galina Antonovna  
 Prostak, Irina Stepanovna

*In Israel*

Ghetto Survivors  
 Boyko, Tanya (Tatiana Lifshitz)  
 Fiterson (Vodinskaya), Sima  
 Goland (Golan), Sarah  
 Goldin, Chaim  
 Gordon, Hila  
 Gorelik, Maysei  
 Grinstein, Ya'akov  
 Nechamchik (Tassman), Hinda  
 Okun, Leonid  
 Perevozkina, Yeva  
 Rubenchik, Abram  
 Rubenchik (Iberman), Yocheved

Taubkin, David  
Yudovich, Yefim Yakovlevich

## ELSEWHERE

*Kovno Ghetto Survivors*  
Ginaite, Sarah

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Brantzovsky, Fanya  
Gurdas, Rachelle  
Kowarsky, Hannah (Goldberg)  
Kremer, Alex  
Kremer, Anna  
Margolis, Rachel  
Rapuch, Lucy  
Rozenwald, Dina (Kagan)  
Shneidman, Noah N.

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Davidson, Fruma  
Grinstein, Ya'akov  
Iberman-Rubenchik, Yocheved  
Kirshenboym, Chanah  
Liond, Reuven  
Rubenchik, Tzvi  
Rubenchik, Rivka  
Smolar, Hersh  
Tassman, Hinda  
Trebnik, Dvora  
Tukarski, Miriam  
Mr. Tukarski  
Yafo (Yoffe), Zelig

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Smolar, Hersh  
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 Leyzer, Irna Ivanovna  
 Liventov, Mikhail Lvovich  
 Lyagushevich, Evgenia Vikentyevna  
 Martsynovsky, Gerogy Georgievich  
 Nikitin (born Shteingart), Nikolai Mikhailovich  
 Nikiforova, Antonina Gavilovna  
 Plavinskaya, Varvara Vladimirovna  
 Prostak, Fyodor Terentyevich  
 Radetsky, Stefan Rafailovich  
 Saychik, Vasili Ivanovich  
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